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THROUGH THE
GARDEN OF ALLAH



AN EARLY MORNING VIEW OF THE GOLDEN HORN, CONSTANTINOPLE.

THROUGH THE GARDEN OF ALLAH

By

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*The Lion of the Frontier, Brothers in Arms
etc.*

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CHILDREN OF THE GOLDEN HORN

CHAPTER I

CHILDREN OF THE GOLDEN HORN

CONSTANTINOPLE! There is magic in the name.

There was a thin, silken, gossamer haze, lazily floating over the deep blue of the Sea of Marmora.

Toward the distance, luxuriantly shimmering in the eastern sunlight, were low-lying hills. Here and there came a glint of gold as the sun's rays caught and reflected the glory of some mushroom-topped mosque. Tall and white, and as sentinels looking out upon these waters of destiny and centuries of tragedy, were slender minarets, symbolical of the Crescent and its vast fields of wasted power.

Ten years ago or more this was Constantinople, the capital of the mighty Ottoman Empire and the home of the Sultans and the Caliphs. It was the centre, the hub, of the great Moslem world. It was known as the City of Enchantment and as the Diamond of the Orient.

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Now, well—it is merely Istanbul, secondary in importance to the newly-created Ankara. The famous bejewelled palaces of the Sultans are public museums. The last of the Sultans has gone. With a few treasures screwed up in an ordinary newspaper, he fled into the blackness of the night and sought refuge upon a British man-of-war. Until quite recently, he was subsisting in penury in an insignificant villa in Switzerland. Since then, his daughter has married the son of the richest man in the world—His Exalted Highness, the Nizam of Hyderabad. And the son-in-law makes easier the lot of the ex-monarch.

As I traversed the Galata Bridge, which connects the more modern city with the old, I looked, instinctively, for those intimate touches I knew so well of old.

Curious, but as the scene unfolded itself before my eyes, I thought of America.

Turkey—the modern Turkey—has changed.

Once it was, only a decade ago, when the famous berries of fez dyed the headgear of every Turkish believer; there was east, flowing raiment; the curled Turkish slipper fell noiselessly upon the cobble-stones of the winding bazaars; there was a cadence in the light, silvery footsteps of those who gazed, sometimes with provokingly roguish eyes, from

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behind the impenetrable sanctuary of the *yashmak*.

Then, and it was but a decade ago, on the Holy Friday of each week, the Sultans rode in state to the Mosque. There was colour. There was pageantry.

Scarlet-clad lancers, mounted upon some of the tallest horses in Europe, swept majestically along before the Royal carriage. The people bent their heads in salutation, not so much to the Sultan, but to the dual personality, the Caliph of all Islam.

Now, all this has gone. There is the law of the Ataturk. He has decreed that the fez is an emblem of servitude and national weakness. The crescent, which once adorned the fez, has gone also—with the last of the Caliphs. Turkey is no longer a nation which absorbs its strength primarily from religion. The fez has given way to the bowler and the Homburg. The flowing garments have gone, to make room for the reach-me-down. The *yashmak* has disappeared, and the Turkish damsel now bargains at the store. She has grown in stature also—to the extent of high-heeled shoes, excessively Parisian in conception, which now adorn or maltreat her feet as the case might be.

Curious, perhaps, to drag America into all this, but frankly I do not think that there would

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have been these startling changes but for President Wilson.

In 1918, when the Ottoman Empire lay sprawling in the dust like some great, winded colossus, a great majority in Turkey looked to America to assume a Mandate.

A deputation was sent to America to this end, not so much because Turkey was enamoured of America, but because, as it was put at the time, President Wilson was more friendly than was Mr. Lloyd George.

Nothing came of this manifestation, although the subject was seriously considered. America, of course, may consider herself well out of what would have been a horrible mess. Had she accepted the mandate, she would have had to support the Sultan and the Constantinople Government against the rising forces of revolution under Mustapha Kemal, now the Ghazi and the leader of his nation.

What the outcome would have been is not for me to surmise. Certain it is, however, that in many fundamental ways the present-day Turkey would be different.

The opposing forces between the Sublime Porte and revolutionary Angora were so finely balanced. The intrusion of another element would have swayed the forces of war and the destinies of many millions.

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The Western cap is now the symbol of modern Turkey. As a symbol it causes one to think again of what might have happened or not have happened if America had accepted that mandate.

The peaks of the Western caps are a constant source of worry and annoyance to the Turks. They fidget with them as does an irritable man with a jagging tooth. It is as if the average Turk would tear away the peak were he to summon up the requisite moral courage. More often than not he seeks to hide it from his offending gaze. He droops it over his ear. When the peak incommodes the ear, it is pushed round to the back of the neck.

And the women? We—they have gone far. They have come from the shelter of the *yashmak* and they have adopted the coat and skirt. They, too, have the hat complex, however. Millinery shops quickly go bankrupt in the modern Istanbul. The women tie their hair in a multi-coloured veil and leave it at that. When they discover the solace and the mental satisfaction to be derived from Western millinery confections, the Turk will probably give another and more vicious tweak to the peak of his own much-maligned headgear.

Already the younger generation of Turkish women is beginning to insist upon a place in

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industry. They are to be found behind the receptionists' counters in the hotels, they are beginning to finger typewriters, they are beginning to walk the streets unattended.

They have even discovered that they have elbows and the uses to which these can be applied when places on public vehicles are limited. I have yet to discover the difference in effect between an elbow in the ribs on the sun-lit streets of ancient Istanbul and one received when on the brilliantly illuminated platforms of Piccadilly Underground or the New York Subway.

In as much as the greatest social change in Turkey has been effected by liberating the women there, I took an early opportunity of discovering that facet of Modern Turkey. I wanted to meet both the old and the new women of Istanbul; and so I contrived to meet both at one and the same time. With the former, one of the emancipated women—her silk-hosed granddaughter—arranged the introduction, and it was literally a case of the meeting of extremes.

Zobeda (for that was her name) met me timidly, for I was one of those beings still to be kept at a respectable distance—a man. Many years of incarceration behind the walls of her lord's seraglio had rendered her incapable of

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meeting the world. She found it well-nigh impossible to face the realities of a landscape changed so miraculously by the Young Turks.

I had great difficulty in bringing about this meeting, but I strived for it believing that Zobeda was one of the few surviving women of her particular type. I wanted contrast, the more easily to determine exactly how far the women of Turkey had assimilated the new thought.

Although the revolutionary character of changes brought about by the new regime in Turkey are truly staggering, yet it must be said that no hand has been stretched towards depriving anybody of her rightful property and prestige; so that Zobeda retained her estate to the full under the new order, and was allowed to live her life in her own way.

As I stepped into the courtyard of her palatial house, surrounded as it was by wonderful old-world gardens, I thought that within those walls the twentieth century might not have dawned at all. The air was heavy with scented citron blossom, sycamore trees stood like sentinels around the outer wall as if guarding the harem, and yellowish-brown cinnamon trees lined the marble pathway to the fountain in the centre of the garden. Here we sat in the chequered shade of an arboreal vine.

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The present-day outdoor garb of all Turkish women—shall I say by law?—is the same as that of any European woman in London or Paris. But when Zobeda received me at her home she wore the dress that she used to appear in a decade ago. It was, indeed, so colourful and becoming that I took particular notice of it.

On her head she had a small red velvet cap, encircled by a beautifully embroidered handkerchief of green silk, over which strings of pearls and tiny gold coins were attached like festoons. On the top of this skull cap was a diamond clasp in the shape of a crescent, from which hung a long tassel of gold thread strung with pearls and rubies.

Over her long skirt was a close-fitting vest, highly ornamented and laced in front with thick gold braid. Her long loose trousers narrowed to the ankles, and she wore an elegant and costly shawl with long tappets.

Her eyes, though old were radiant as big black diamonds, and her finger-nails were reddened with henna.

Zobeda spoke to me in Persian, and then in Arabic; and continued a more heated argument in French, which surprised me, till she told me that during her youth no woman of Turkey was qualified to “grace her husband’s home” unless she was a good cook, a good

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horse-rider and a conversationalist; but, above all, she had to know at least five languages. Zobeda knew eight.

A servant girl brought real Turkish coffee, with lots of sugar and very strong; another bore a tray full of fresh and dried fruits; and a third slices of iced melon. From each she tasted a little, and then passed on to me.

“*Allaho—Karim*, meaning Allah is bountiful,” she said: which, she explained, was a mere signal for me to partake of the proffered eatables.

“You see,” she continued, “it has grown a custom in better-class families that the hostess first tastes the food before the guests, so that visitors should be quite sure in their minds that the food contains nothing objectionable. There was so much talk of poisoning, ground glass and so on in our earlier years. To-day, this tasting is merely a convention.”

I touched my forehead in salutation, then passed my hand to my eyes and to my heart, connoting strictly in Turkish fashion that the head, the eyes and my heart were all at the service of my hostess.

Emboldened by her many courtesies, and bent upon reaching the truth, I asked whether it *was* not really a life in a golden cage that she had lived for the thirty years preceding the freedom of Turkish women.

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Her eyes narrowed a little. Her gaze was piercing. This old lady's eyes were now old lady's memories; they were stronger for things a long way off. Then she spoke.

"I do agree that it was a cage—but a very large cage." Her recollection went back to the dawn of the century. "You would notice that the entire extent of my house is more than forty acres. A house of sixty rooms, a garden in which there is a lake, a horse-riding track, room for everything.

"In the morning I rode with my three sisters, after lunch I could walk miles in my garden, and I could go anywhere on the shores of the Bosphorus fully escorted by my servants and retainers.

"I could receive visits from Lady friends, and could visit them in their homes; I played and danced for my lord in the harem, and was loved by him. One man's love was enough for me.

"You see that?" She directed my attention to the furthest end of a spacious arcade surrounded by a dome-shaped structure, with its cornice ornamented with Turkish inscriptions. "There I used to have dinner with my lord after he came home from his duties with the Sultan; and there, under the lingering moon, I danced for him—for him alone. I played the flute and he,

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my loving husband, poured gold *mohurs* in my lap—and I was happy, very happy.”

Tears welled in her eyes as she dreamed of her romance, her life of peace and protection, as she termed it.

The old lady thought that the liberty that she enjoyed was of ample measure. She was trained to remain in the sphere of womanhood, to be a good mother and a good wife—the house her domain, protected from the rough and tumble of the world, to be loved and cared for.

She told me that there could be no discussion of equality of sexes. The spheres of the two have been made separate by Nature. In the time of her youth the women of Turkey did not have to shoulder responsibilities of a grosser type, for she considered engaging in business, or service of any sort, to be definitely beyond all womanhood.

Her sole object was to be “the mother of the nation”, to keep her lord in good health, to look after the haven which a man wants after the day’s hard work, to bring up her children in the best traditions of her race, “for the woman was the mother of man.” So long as that mother could be the custodian of a man’s interests and activities, just that long, she emphasized, would the reality and traditions of the race remain.

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She had eighteen servants and six slave girls. The tempo of life was not rapid, but her days were happy.

"But the whole scene," she said, as her granddaughter joined us, "appears now like an absurd dream. Things have been changed here in tune with the changing times; we have had to come into line with the rest of the world."

Her granddaughter, dressed in the best Paris creation, with short hair and a cigarette between her lips, then spoke her mind. She, like everybody in Turkey, was a hero-worshipper—her heart was deservedly at the feet of the President of their Republic, Kemal Ataturk.

"Think what he has done for us—this one man has made Turkey live at a time when Turkey was dead——" Here she reminded me that, after the Great War, when their nation had practically been wiped out as a power, there was famine, disease, murder, brigandage; "the whole nation was made to crawl as slaves." She put it strongly.

The fabric of a new nation had to be built up. Kemal started to build, fought wars, reclaimed the lost heritage—won for Turkey the right to live as a self-respecting nation.

The world had gone ahead; women of New Turkey had to come out to help their menfolk to rebuild, to take their share in all walks of life.

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The unveiling of women was but a superficial sign of progress.

With the ardent passion of youth, Zobeda's granddaughter told me that at last, after centuries in the seraglio, Turkish women had an opportunity to prove that they should not be "buried behind harem walls. Their place is in the front ranks of general national activity," she said.

In the banks all over Turkey more than seventeen thousand girls are working. There are more than two thousand women doctors and an equal number of women in the professions of law and education. There are women police, women authors, journalists and even publishers. Eight thousand six hundred new schools and colleges for girls have been entirely managed by Turkish qualified teachers. Even a tank and machine-gun corps exist for home defence, run and maintained by women. In civil flying, women pilots have covered more than half of Asiatic Turkey.

In the arts, women of New Turkey have found few equals, so much so that practically all the best embroidery done in the Near East to-day is commissioned from the Istanbul Art College.

Marriage is no longer regarded as the only career, but home life is still held in high esteem.

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The freedom of the women of Turkey is regarded by my young girl-friend as the right type of freedom; for, to the chagrin of many a Turkish diehard who prophesied the worst, the women have made good. The slogan has it that the future of Turkey now rests with her women. From what I saw of it in Istanbul, I have no hesitation in saying that that future is bright.

All this is in such striking contrast to the old.

But in this bewildering effort of blending the old with the new, I had observed that essentials of Turkish traditions remain the same. Let us view the ancient palace standing upon the even more ancient site of the Acropolis.

I entered through the principal gate and came immediately into an exquisite garden which stretches right down to the sea-front. This is now a public park to which mothers wheel their children in up-to-date perambulators. The soldiers gravitate there in order to show off their uniforms.

Upon a hill are the kiosks of the palace. Rows of cypress trees indicate the way to the inner *serai*. The trees, silent reminders of an age-long pageantry, lead directly to the Gate of Felicity where, standing in the portico, the courtiers were wont to kiss the hand of their Sultan.

On the left is the old Diwan room, resembling

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the famous Diwan Khas in Delhi. Behind all this is the Imperial Harem.

Even now, after the lapse of several years, one approaches with a certain amount of trepidation. The walls radiate atmosphere; one can feel the sense of bliss and tragedy which the stones reflect. The dramas enacted there were too real, too intense, too gripping and too vibrant for the easy dissipation of their reactions.

There are the watch-holes at the entrance where the black-visaged eunuchs kept ceaseless vigil. From the watch-holes a dark passage leads to the living-rooms of this dispersed legion. In this passage more than one unwanted wife met a sudden death with a silken cord round her neck.

The harem proper is a fantastic collection of both large and small rooms. Each is furnished with costly divans and tiny tables. The doors are of mother-of-pearl and of ivory and are exquisitely worked. Marble baths and tanks are everywhere, but the fountains which once gave a silvery cascade are now silent.

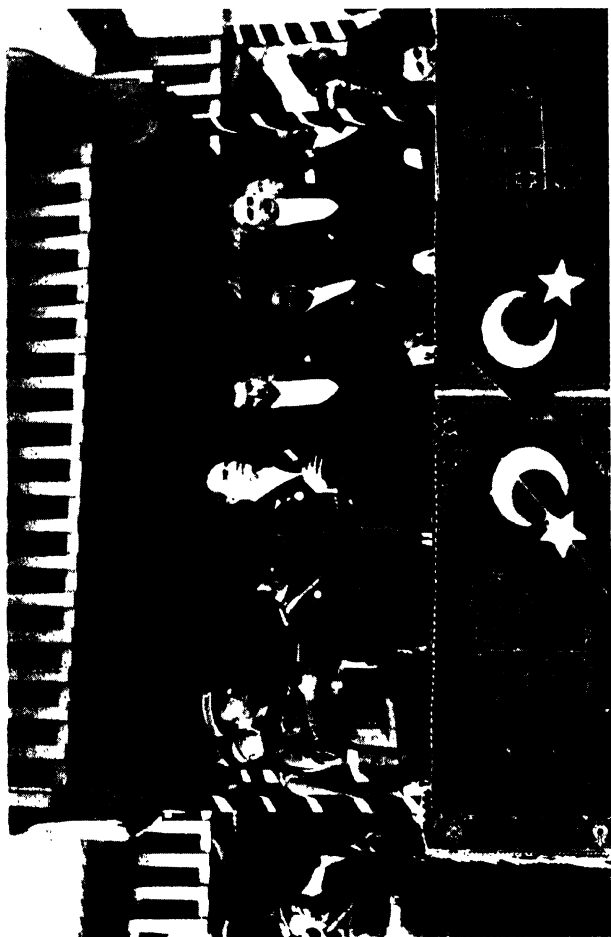
Screens of wonderful filigree marble screen the windows.

This was the home of many hundreds of beautiful women. The majority fought among themselves for supremacy in the attentions of

their royal master. Some who found their way there through dark and mysterious channels ate of ground glass and of the poisonous herbs of the desert rather than await the summons to the royal chamber.

Away from the harem, there are the rooms of the Sultan, packed with the worldly goods of a departed monarchy. There are gold cups and gold thrones, costly embroideries, daggers, jewelled belts, and royal garments, telling the history of a period of 400 years. There is the glistening throne of Shah Ismail of Persia, which was taken by Sultan Salim in 1514. It is of gold, and is inlaid with rubies and emeralds. As a seat for the mighty it must have been amazingly uncomfortable. The whole is a museum of memories.

Not so far away is the fortified castle of the Seven towers. This too, echoes the misery and the tragedies of the past. One enters through a triumphal arch, but there was little of triumph attaching to this gruesome pile. The place is one mass of ghastly, black dungeons, the walls of which have been worn smooth by the continuous procession which found its way therein. Men of high estate have met their deaths in these pestilential holes. Even Sultans have had their heads swept from their bodies with one stroke of a sword. There was one monarch whose



KEMAL ATATURK—THE PRESIDENT OF THE TURKISH REPUBLIC
WITH HIS OFFICERS, ADDRESSING THE PEOPLE AT ANKARA

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death was particularly horrible. His mother crept upon him in the night and strangled him with her own hands.

Here there is a rectangular room filled with wooden cages. In these prisoners were kept, huddled like hens, until they were taken out to be done to death in full view of the other prisoners.

Nearby is the Pit of Blood.

Men were made to project their heads over the side of the pit. A sword gleamed, and their head fell "plop" into the red pool below.

By the pit there are stakes. Around the stakes, about the height of a man's heart, there are bullet holes in the walls.

All this must be new history growing out of the old; but that which is essentially ancient in Turkey will live for ever. That hoary institution is its bazaars.

There are electrically lit markets, there are old and indescribably decrepit bazaars, there are clusters of booths hurriedly put up; even there are vendors, who carry their wares on trays. But in spirit and colourfulness they are astonishingly similar.

That vaulted bazaar, for instance, where you could buy the costliest jewel, and the next shop might be a cobbler's, where humanity surges like waves of the Golden Horn. Every known

language is being spoken, gay Kamarbands are decorating a frock coat, turbaned men of Kurdistan are vainly trying to make the Turkish shopkeeper understand that the price asked for is at least five times more than they can afford to pay.

"Go to the shrine," shouts the shopkeeper back to his Kurdish customer, "and pray that gold might grow on the bushes in order to enable you to buy what you want."

After much coffee drinking at the booth, the offer is clinched, both smile, and the Kurd ties the ring in the tail end of his turban, only to find that some deft fingers are trying to open the knot as he makes his way through the throng.

A number of idle spectators has gathered to listen as to what would an American tourist do with an old, rusty sword, for the price of which he is hotly engaged in a bargain with a Greek vendor. Neither knows each other's language, and the guide of the American cannot adequately translate the jibes of the shopkeeper.

A few paces onward men and women are sipping coffee, that real coffee which only the Turk can make, with a great deal of sugar and no milk; others are eating sliced melons, and yet another wrapping syrupy sweets in his handkerchief.

There is din and noise, there is laughter, and

even an occasional exchange of hot words, which soon dies down as the bargain is struck; till the policeman comes round to tell you that within a quarter of an hour the bazaar will be shut and you had better leave, the lighting-up time has been over these two hours.

Only in Pera—the European quarter—the life is still throbbing with what is not so Turkish, and in the cabarets and dance halls there I could not have imagined that I was in Istanbul. It will vie with the gay night-life of Paris any day.

But modernization notwithstanding, an average Turk even now will spit noisily when you speak to him about what goes on in Pera. "That is not Turkish, that Pera," he scornfully replies, "I would slit the throat of my daughter if I found her there after dark," and leaves you to make your own deductions from his remarks.

And yet, if the most recently administered bazaars have to close at a respectable hour, you can still go to enjoy the life in one of the others a little more remotely situated from the centre of the city; because a bazaar is about as symbolical a place of an Oriental city as Westminster might be of London, or Broadway of New York. It is the club of the people, it is the one place in the town where you can gossip and not be taken seriously.

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The very name “bazaar” conjures up a scene of mysterious traffickings and an environment of colour and adventure. How many romances, Western and Oriental, have had their commencement in bazaars, and how many unwritten adventures have had their inception in those romantic caves of commerce? A market in Europe is merely a market. But a bazaar may be the gate to Paradise or to Eblis for any man at any moment.

The long, shaded vistas of these mercantile galleries, the babel of voices which arises in them, the vocabulary of protest, of cajolery, of insistence, in which these voices are couched, the drench and fall of heat, of fragrance, of less worthy odours, the emanations of rapacity, scorn, cunning and hatred they give forth, the profoundly mystical sense of something as old as time they evoke in their strange withdrawnness—these things serve to place them among the more wonderful of human institutions, to render them of the stuff of imagination and wonder.

To enter a bazaar anywhere between Constantinople and Rangoon is to enter a place dedicated to the self-same passions and experiences. And surely this bazaar of which I now write was merely a replica of all the thousands of bazaars in Arabia, in Egypt, in India, in Afghanistan or Burma. Its sounds, its scents, its

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kaleidoscopic colours, its strident and vociferous cries and the technical gesticulations of its inhabitants, are the stereotyped possessions of the chaffering places of the whole indivisible Orient.

The trading methods, the craftsmanship, of the East, are virtually one; a jeweller, a carpenter in Egypt may be a jeweller and carpenter in Turkestan or in India. The local fashions may differ, but the methods of workmanship are the same. The long and strenuous business of bargaining, the expressions employed, the vows asseverated, the very epithets of pleading and protestation and compliment or the reverse may be eloquently couched in Turkish or Burmese, or indeed in a hundred tongues, but, like the notes of music, they have the one meaning and intention, they all spring from the same ancient reservoir of usage.

The little booth with its jumbled display of goods or articles, the till recently be-turbaned and generally bearded human who presides over its destinies, these are ever the same. Time has touched them no more than the everlasting rocks of Syria or the forests which hang above Tiflis.

It takes a lifetime to understand bazaar philosophy. If the wisest of men thinks he can over-reach it he is a fool, for in its ancient cunning it is instinctively wiser than he. Not the

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most blank of "poker faces" can hope to prevail over it. Illegible as it may seem, the eye of the bazaar will read it, will discern in its apparent immobility a thousand proofs of eagerness, of desire, of hope. The bazaar is a sphinx whose secret and whose wisdom it is not given to man to comprehend. And yet to feel the heart-beat of the East you must linger in its bazaars. A thousand years' modernizing cannot bring a change upon the face of an Oriental bazaar: if a change comes upon it, the Eastern emotion will cease to be, and Asia's soul will be dead!

There is, however, a side-light which I ought to throw upon what might be considered a grave peril in Constantinople, for which the new-found liberty of the Turk is mainly responsible. It appertains to the night life in and round Pera—the fashionable part of Constantinople.

The present-day Turk, with no harem to go to, where he usually held a little concert of an evening, now seeks the night life and the society of the thousands of dubious ladies of foreign origin who swarm in the Turkish capital—Russian refugees, needy Hungarians and Germans, Circassians, and even freed slaves, who would formerly have been sold in the marketplace—indeed, such a miscellaneous motley of femininity as surely no city in the world has ever witnessed.

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These conditions naturally lend themselves to the machinations of the many international blackguards who have always haunted Constantinople, and who now direct their vulture-like minds to profit by such a state of things. They see a paradise of beautiful, unprotected women, many of them of high rank and great attractions, entirely at their mercy. Who will miss a ruined Russian countess or the discarded wife of a Pash? So a hideous and soul-destroying trade has grown up, a wholesale traffic in kidnapped women, who are sold as white slaves to the baths, the stews and the harems of Syria, Anatolia and Egypt, or, in some cases, traded to people in Istanbul itself.

Yes, it is a changed Istanbul. On my last visit there I could not recognize what was practically a city of men. It is so no longer, as the foregoing pages have detailed. Constantinople, once the sacred city of the Turk, is now the Paris of the East, without the brio and dash of Paris. For the Eastern is too grave to throw himself into the puerile gaiety of the French capital. He cannot dance the can-can. He shrinks from the Charleston. He has no objection, however, to the *houris* of the Arabian nights, or to talking to them in the language of exaggerated poetry, telling them that their eyes are like the reflection of the stars in the

water of the Golden Horn, or their cheeks like the roses of Ispahan. So his dance-halls are rather a failure, beautiful though their Russian, Circassian and Turkish coryphees may be.

It is now to these places, unfortunately, that the emancipated Turkish women throng, and where many of them disappear quite as readily as their foreign sisters. But the chief centres of attraction and danger to these unfortunate creatures for whom I feel truly sorry, are the public baths. Many women leave their homes every Friday, which is a "ladies' day" for these places, and never return. Indeed, they are never seen again by friends or relatives.

The police? You do not know Istanbul if you ask such a question. The police of the Turkish capital care as much about a lost lady as your London bobby about a stray cat. They will, of course, pretend to be very concerned when the case is reported to them by an agitated husband or brother. They will accept a substantial *douceur* and promise to comb the city. But they know well how hopeless the quest is, and adopt a policy of masterly inactivity.

I had heard of the widespread practice of kidnapping unsuspecting Turkish women of rank newly emancipated from the veil and the seraglio, but had given the matter only passing thought until it thrust itself upon me with all the

crude shock of reality. It was a Friday, and I had indulged in a Turkish bath at a well-known establishment in the rather sordid and absurdly named Grand Rue. It had not been a very good bath, but after cooling off, I was enjoying a cigarette in the garden behind the establishment. A fountain was tinkling musically, and it was cool and shady in the little arbour where I sat. Suddenly I heard a voice in French not many yards away—a man's voice. I caught every syllable distinctly, though the words were scarcely above a whisper.

“They come here every Friday at three o'clock. I shall have a taxi at the door, and you shall drive, you hear? I shall tell them that I am the manager, and that their car has had an accident. They will naturally enter the conveyance, and you will drive at top speed to where the steam launch lies. You understand?”

“Yes, but will it be worth the risk?”

“I should say so. Have you seen them? We shall take them straight to Smyrna.”

“But the husband is a wealthy man. Why not hold the women to ransom?”

“Altogether too dangerous. I want to get back to Athens with a whole skin, and you to Trieste, I suppose, with a full purse. Now listen . . .”

That was all I heard. The rascals at this

point left their seats, and as I rose I caught only a rear view of them. But it was sufficient. I would remember them again. I would be present at the little interview they had planned.

Next Friday, therefore, I made a point of being on guard at the door of the baths at three o'clock. I had not long to wait. Soon a handsome car of French make drew up, and two tall and exquisite young ladies alighted and entered the establishment.

When they were safely inside, I turned to the chauffeur who had driven them.

"Please be on your guard," I said. "There is a plot to capture your mistress and her friend. Do not leave this place on any pretext."

He became very excited—he was a Frenchman—and asked a hundred questions. I told him all I knew, and his mouth hardened.

"So that's it?" he murmured. "Well, we shall see."

Some five minutes later one of the conspirators emerged from the baths and hailed the chauffeur in French. I winked and nodded to the manservant, putting him on the *qui vive*.

"I am the manager," said the wily woman-snatcher in oily accents. "Your mistress has asked me to tell you not to wait. You may drive home."

The chauffeur regarded him steadily for a

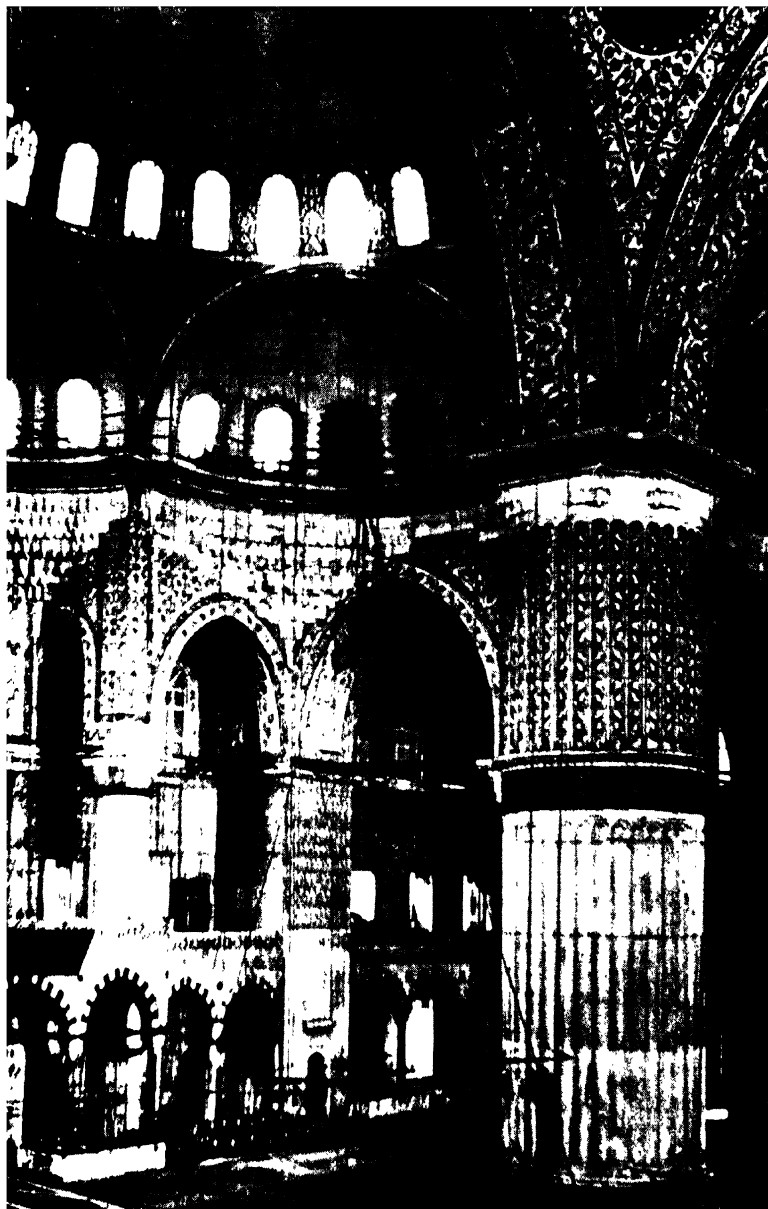
CHILDREN OF THE GOLDEN HORN

moment, then raising his foot in the manner of the French *savateur*, dealt the scoundrel such a hearty kick in the region of the waistcoat that he doubled up and fell groaning in agony to the pavement, where he received still further savage treatment from the enraged Parisian.

At last, screaming and blaspheming, the white slaver picked himself up and hobbled off, pursued for yards by the infuriated chauffeur.

Soon the ladies reappeared, and I heaved a sigh of relief when I saw them safely enter their car. But for how long were they safe, I asked myself, in such a city?

So Istanbul jazes, or pretends to jazz, the night life continues beneath the coloured lamps and the young Turks believe they have imported a Parisian atmosphere. But a nation cannot disburden itself of its ancient proclivities all at once. The dance-halls of Constantinople are merely public harems. Western opinion has simply given a communal impulse to what was once domestic, and thousands of inexperienced and witless women are daily and nightly running risks from which, under the old system, they were at least immune. It is a sad commentary on Western civilization!



THE MOSQUE OF ST. SOPHIA AT CONSTANTINOPLE

THE HEART OF TURKEY

CHAPTER II

THE HEART OF TURKEY

WHEN ONE leaves Istanbul and makes for Anatolia, one enters a different world.

Eski-Shehr—a dusty, poverty-stricken village, yet a name, nevertheless. The Greeks never mention it without spitting. The Turk intones it with a kind of reverence. The Greeks, when they occupied Asia Minor after the Great War, advanced beyond Eski-Shehr. In their retreat they demolished half of the town and set fire to the rest.

It was here that Mustapha Kemal achieved his greatest victory and set the seal upon his ascendancy.

Here one can still recapture some of the spirit of war. There are roofless and shapeless structures still begrimed with smoke, but reconstruction is going on.

In Eski-Shehr they still regard the stranger with some suspicion. One has to carry one's passport everywhere and even then one is liable to be hauled off, with the greatest politeness,

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it is true, to the police station for interrogation.

On one of my marches to the police station, the way led by a cafe. The policeman suggested coffee and, what is more, had the grace to pay for it also!

At the police station, after a nervous official had asked me my business and had fingered a passport he was obviously incapable of reading, I was invited to a room at the rear of the station. Here I was regaled with melon, more coffee, neat and Oriental sweets.

The "cop" who apprehended me acted as waiter!

In the hills beyond Eski-Shehr is Ankara—the new home of the New Turkey. On arriving at the railway station, the first thing which you see is the wall built by Timur the Lame.

As to the town itself. On a steep rocky hill of about five hundred feet in height, you see rows upon rows of houses, mostly of brick, stuck upon its sides as if grown out of a mound. The ancient wall surrounds the old section of the city; and the dry plains that surround it give it a desolate view.

Soon, however, your eyes alight upon the broad avenues, and tall buildings "kissing the feet" of the rocky eminences of Ankara. These stately buildings, the government offices, hotels,

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the parliament house and various embassies and foreign legations leave you in no doubt that Kemalist Turkey is going ahead.

“Your chief problem here is water?” I asked an official of the new regime. As an old soldier of Turkey who had been fighting for his country since he was fifteen years of age, he seemed to take my innocent remark somewhat unkindly.

“We have had only ten years’ real peace here,” he replied brusquely. “Give us time. Give us time.”

I praised the wonderful effort which they had put in even in ten years to make blossom the desert-like Angora; and he liked it.

He added to my knowledge of reconstruction of new Turkey by pointing out the installation of a very powerful wireless station, public parks, avenues and boulevards; and “Look at this hotel,” in the lounge of which we were talking.

It might have been in the heart of a most fashionable European town, and its charges were certainly half what you pay in a London hotel of the same status. I paid no more than eighteen shillings a day with all my meals in; and as I, a teetotaller, did not have any wines, they reduced the amount to twelve shillings.

I admired the ballet dancer. The old Pasha fixed me with a stern gaze. “Do you think that

this woman is Turkish?" he asked. I could not answer.

"Hear and note particularly," he reclined towards me, "that this is a Viennese dancer. Not a Turkish woman. We have not debased ourselves quite to that extent yet." He spat.

"And the abolishing of the veil?" I parried.

"Ah, that had to come one day. It was the Law of the Ghazi. My Ghazi, Ataturk!"

A sudden memory rang in his brain like a chime from a distant tower. After promising not to reveal his name, he agreed to tell me what chord had struck in his heart when he thought of his hero—the Ataturk—the mighty Ghazi—whom all Turks love. As a historical document with so much human sweetness his story is worth recording.

"Well, it was fifteen or more years ago," he began, as if in a reverie, "I would not worry about the exact date, but I remember having rushed to the Baron's Hotel in Aleppo, and finding Mustapha Kemal Pasha, now our President of the Turkish Republic, pacing up and down the dining-room in a thoughtful mood. I begged him to flee, for the English troops had entered the outskirts of the city.

"He beckoned me to keep quiet, and after being told that all his men had safely retired, even his bodyguard, he ordered me to pull

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down the blinds of the room overlooking the road. Then he whispered a command: 'Leave me alone, and shelter yourself as you can: as for me,' he smiled, 'my death is still very far.'

"Presently we saw the figures of three Arabs flit past the deserted hotel like three ghosts, chased by yelling troopers of the Indian cavalry.

" 'Go, and hide yourself, you fool,' again huskily commanded Kemal to me.

" 'I go where my master goes,' said I; and saw him leap out of the window into the orchard below. Behind the haystacks in the hotel's compound we hid ourselves. Barely two minutes after that an English detachment, following the Indian regiment, was searching the hotel for fleeing Turks.

"Never will there be a greater thrill in my life than the one I had lying covered in hay below the hotel window, when I heard an English sergeant say to his officer: 'I sure smell them Turks yet, sir.' To our great relief his officer only laughed at the remark.

"It was well past midnight when the whole of the Syrian town of Aleppo slumbered as the prize of English victory, when the hero of the Turkish Republic and I moved out of our hiding places, and, disguised as wandering Dervishes, got safely out of the city.

"Dawn found us again in our Turkish camp,

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and those of us who were anxious lest the Ghazi was captured by the Allies came in batches to see for themselves that we were alive.

“Then the hour struck for the victory of Kemal; he was denounced by his colleagues in Constantinople as a rebel; he rallied the soldiers of the Sultan in Anatolia under his banner, and it was at Samsoon, where he landed ostensibly to disarm his forces, but in reality to project a newer plan for Turkey from the slough of the Sultan’s time, that I saw the real Kemal.

“The scene in the small school room in which he addressed his followers still lingers in my memory. ‘Men of my race,’ rose his voice, ‘death comes to every man. Since there is no escape from it, why die like vermin, why not like Turks?’ The atmosphere was electric, not only mentally, but also physically, for a tremendous thunderstorm was raging outside, and lightning had struck an adjoining building.

“He spoke of the great sacrifices that his people had made. He recalled the great glory that was of the Sultan Fateh, whose name resounded up to the walls of Vienna, he impressed upon his hearers that the bullets of the enemy never could turn the attack of the Turkish nation.

“‘And are we not a nation now?’ he roared, his face flushed with excitement, for he held the

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Sultan's telegram, saying: 'If there ever was a scrap of paper, it is this, it is this, it is this, the Sultan is selling us to our enemies.'

"Within twenty days, ragged and ill-fed men from the deserts of Konia, from the uplands of Turkish Kurdistan, from the pasture lands of Qasarie, swelled his ranks to a mighty army—an army which not only established the national sovereignty of Turkish nationhood, but showed the world once again that only one man can still make a dismembered people form a solid unit.

"That he, although defeated on all fronts during the Great War, pronounced a rebel, both against the Sultan's State and the Moslem Church by the Grand Mufti of Constantinople, could not only muster an effective force for resistance, but could actually defeat the mighty army of Greece, and win back a place for his people in the first rank of the community of nations, is so much recent history, which I need not repeat.

"The solid fact is the attributes of this wondrous man, this one man, who is New Turkey personified.

" 'Now what are you going to do with the veiling of women?' asked a Deputy from an outlandish town. Kemal looked hard at the man, and asked Kabchabashi—the tea bearer—to

give some more coffee to the interrogator: 'Drink more coffee, my friend,' said the Ghazi to the man, 'so that it might help you to recollect that the days of the Sultans are over. We are living in a new age, with new ideas, new ideals.'

"An ink bottle was standing on the desk beside me, and as he held it in his hand, I hoped that he would not throw it at the Deputy in his rage; but instead, placing a sheet of paper on it, he tied a string over the stopper. Then he addressed us all: 'You see that bottle wrapped in paper? Well, our women were clothed in their veils and trailing costumes, covered from head to foot like this bottle. Fresh air could not get to their noses, they could not exercise their limbs, and piled on fat lolling upon cushions.'

"With a sneer he looked at the Deputy who had questioned the Ghazi for unveiling the Turkish women. 'And you, you would like the women to grow like fat cows, I suppose? No, we need women who can stand shoulder to shoulder with men in all walks of life, and do not want to bury half the Turkish population in sloth and treat them as pieces of furniture.'

"Sure enough it was, too, for next day when I wanted to make a long journey into the interior of Anatolia, it was a young girl of New

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Turkey who mapped out my route, standing behind the counter unveiled like any European woman.

“For some months after the convocation of the National Assembly, it formed part of my duty to go to Smyrna, till a telegram from Angora summoned me to the Ghazi’s new capital.

“Taking advantage of the Ghazi’s illness some of the Deputies had hatched a plot against him in the National Assembly, and had so planned that during the next election he would not be elected as their President.

“Angora, the new capital, could not have seen a greater deluge of rain during its hoary history than the one we were experiencing as we—some of the Old Guards—paddled our way to the House of the Turkish Parliament. The Ghazi was too ill to attend the election; and the speeches which his opponents made on that occasion left none in doubt that whosoever might be elected president, at least the Great Hero was not in the running.

“When the time for the final voting came we could hardly believe our eyes when we saw that Kemal was being lowered into his chair in the President’s Gallery from a stretcher.

“He had come to address the House, ‘at least before I die,’ someone heard him say.

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“As he staggered up to speak, the crowded House was hushed to silence, an ominous silence, such as descends upon frightened birds before the storm bursts.

“He addressed us till late midnight, fainted, then revived, stood up and told us that he cared nothing for himself, but for the nation, in the cause of the people he justified certain laws, and begged his hearers to act wisely.

“The Turks are honest and simple like children, and when they saw their emblem of regeneration without exception everyone wept, wept too with the thought of the great services this one man had rendered them. He was elected unanimously, and borne to his residence in royal state as the dawn was breaking over the distant ruined walls that still skirt old Angora.

“‘I am not happy in this ancient dwelling,’ he once remarked to me as we watched the Turkish fleet pass before us. In the palaces of the Sultans in Constantinople he was never happy, till I saw him one day in his new home in Chinkaya Hills overlooking the gorgeous lowlands that kiss the Angorian Ranges.

“At a distance of even ten yards you will hardly notice his house, for it is curiously built on the old English baronial style. The same

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sort of conical-shaped turrets, the same kind of walls, only Orientalized; and a vast green lawn, very much like an English bowling green, surrounds it. Kemal loves to bask in the sun on that lawn.

“Every day after his breakfast, which consists of dry toast, some milk and many cigarettes, you could see him bareheaded, with a little bald patch showing on his crown, walking, walking deep in thought, and never without a cigarette.

“Both at lunch and dinner, where he invites a few of his old comrades, I always left the table with a half-satisfied appetite; for at lunch beside soup, salads, rice, and fruit and cheese, little else is served. Dinner, too, cannot boast more than four courses, and, of course, there is always a box of cigarettes in front of him. At times he is entirely enveloped in smoke. At least, I have not seen him take wine.

“When it was my good fortune to work there, I always found that practically every paper in the files which I had left for his orders, was read, and even corrected, for Kemal works with astonishing rapidity. Give him a book and he will finish it at one sitting—that is, if he likes the book; and the literature which he reads is biographies of great men—his knowledge of Napoleon is enormous. He even has tried to

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recite some of his poems to us; and his compositions are often much better than those of many modern poets in Turkey.

“Another remarkable fact about him, almost approaching fastidiousness, is as regards the neatness in his appearance and dress. He will not use the same shirt two days running, nor go out of his bedroom without oiling and mastering his hair.

“It is the latter facet of his life which may have attracted his wife—the beautiful daughter of a wealthy merchant in Smyrna. But Kemal’s personality brooks no restraints; what he resolves has to be done.

“I well remember an occasion when he in a mannerscolder me by saying: ‘Do you know what is the difference between a great man and one like you? It is,’ he enlightened me, ‘this, that one makes up his mind about a thing and does it irrespective of consequences, the other dilly-dallies and loses. If you had done the former,’ he smiled that smile full of meanings, ‘you would have become the President of the Turkish Republic in place of me.’

“This shows that Kemal is not really vain, but has an extraordinary amount of self-confidence. Maybe it was that tremendous will that clashed with the will of his wife, for one day we saw the lady leave for her father’s home and

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she never returned as the President's wife to Angora.

"I have known and studied him for years, and yet I must own that I do not know him at all; for how much does one know of Mussolini, of Kitchener, of Bismarck or Napoleon? The actual characteristics of such men are not readily unveiled. What can one 'know' of a man who speaks perhaps a hundred words a day, and sits mute as a Buddha, surrounded by clouds of cigarette smoke?

"Some will tell you that Kemal is a mechanical organizer like Kitchener, whose mentality runs on the wheels of system alone; others, that he is an inspired patriot, so absorbed in the task of nation-building that he has no time nor thought for anything else, and from what I know of him there is a modicum of truth in both opinions."

The air was crisp with the early morning mist as I sallied forth to make a round of the old town of Ankara. I was not so early as I had thought, for climbing those inclines that take one right into the heart of the town, where you can still see the old Turk, I found that women were going about as much "covered" in their *burquas* or cloaks as any one might see in Central Asia or Afghanistan. The Law of the Ghazi says that the women should unveil themselves,

but the older generation cannot adapt themselves to new conditions.

Around the water pump in the middle of a square up the hill I saw girls of ten and fourteen filling their pitchers; smaller ones ran in and out of the adjoining houses playfully engaged in early morning shopping. Yes, shopping, because nearby a man was selling hot *Kulchas* or buns for breakfast.

Turkish workmen, feeling brisk and alert, holding their tools of carpentry or those used in masonry, were emerging from their houses—houses that still retain the ancient character, where a high wall surrounds them, and the windows do not open on the streets. Suddenly there was a twitter amongst the urchins. A *Hodja*, dressed in the long flowing garb of a Moslem priest, had come upon the scene, and was herding the members of his street-school.

A pretty little girl whom I was trying to photograph, what with the excitement of seeing the schoolmaster and with protesting against the taking of the photograph, dropped her copper water bowl.

Picking it up hurriedly, she wiped it with the end of her head-scarf.

“May Allah forgive thee,” she innocently lisped, “there are the verses of the Koran inscribed in this bowl, and the Holy Inscription



had touched the ground—fallen even where my feet are.”

That little remark, more than anything else throughout my wanderings into the modernist Turkey, convinced me that Islam has a very deep root in the hearts of the real Turkish people, nor can, indeed, be divorced from their minds, because for more years than many other Moslem empires, these Turks have been the custodians of Islamic heritage. And this barely two hundred yards from that part of Ankara where the foreigner, sitting in a sumptuously decorated lounge of a hotel, hears from some youth of Turkey that he, at least, does not believe in Allah. No, the heart of Turkey is sound. It can never be godless.

Towards noon I was at the foot of the hill where the President of the Turkish Republic was to review his troops. As troopings of the colours go, it might perhaps not excel that wonderful spectacle that one sees on such an occasion in London; but it was at least symbolical of the fact that “the Grand Father was reviewing his children,” as they term it in Turkey, for it was Kemal who shaped the army of modern Turkey, and still cherishes it as the surest bulwark of the independence of his country.

There was the usual march past, the cavalry,

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the foot soldiery, the gunners and even the nursing corps—all were there; all saluted, bands played, orders were shouted; and it was over in just under an hour, when the Ghazi sat at lunch with his officers in a field camp.

But the true index of all this preparedness was the reception of the public. Directly after lunch, when the gun boomed out the news that the President was on his way to his palace at Chinkaya Hill and would be passing through the town, I was there at a window to witness the scene.

Pavements were lined with men and women; windows of houses and shops were a sea of faces; there was a tense silence, then a distant roar of cheers struck upon our ears.

The cavalcade had started.

Nearer and nearer sounded the cheering. I left the window, as I wanted to watch the reaction of the people from a place where I could be closer to them.

The crowd now surged like a whirlpool. People had invaded the street proper. There was hardly ten feet of room left in the middle for the passage of the President's car; and now the suppressed emotion let itself go, because one could see the outriders thundering up the Kara Oghland Street, past the old offices of the ministries.

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Cavalrymen came up two by two, then three cars followed, and after them was a giant of a motor-car, wherein sat the Ghazi—President Ataturk—the hero of Turkey.

There was no holding the passion of the populace. They were shouting, yelling in Turkish, in Kurdish, in all the jargon known to the Middle East, they were waving flags, they were even playing the national anthem on their gramophone records.

“Our Ghazi—our deliverer—our hero,” they shouted. The enthusiasm was supreme.

A man with a deep scar upon his face was in tears. “I was with this man at Gallipoli, and I know how he saved us from slavery,” he mumbled, as the great car moved slowly through the crowd.

And the Ghazi Ataturk sat there smiling back his acknowledgement to his people. His face, I thought, was lit with a strange exaltation. Little wonder, too, for modern Turkey, or, indeed, the Turkish State of any sort that you might like to think of, was reclaimed by none other than this man. I had no illusions about it, but as I walked back to my hotel I honestly felt that I had seen the modern Napoleon.

As I was making preparations to leave for the interior of Southern Anatolia, I was very kindly assisted by my Turkish official friends

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with letters of introduction to several *Walis* and governors on my way to Syria. The town of Adana was one which I particularly wanted to see, for there more than in any other place you might find the cradle of the modern Turk. Time has brought little change to it.

“At Adana stay at Madam Subhan’s,” my friend counselled me. “Only do not stay in any other boarding house,” he warned me. But in spite of official help I had learned that such advice tends to control a traveller’s movements; and I forthwith resolved to avoid Madam Subhan.

All this, of course, stands for modern Turkey. The next day I left for Konia.

Away in the province of Konia the true Osmani Islam still survives. Konia is a land of cornfields and pastures. Here dwell the real Cilician Turks who helped the Sultans to make the area the centre of Islamic culture for five hundred years.

In the centre of the town of Konia there is a statue of Mustapha Kemal. The hand of the statue is outstretched. Perhaps that is symbolic.

At the moment the hand of the reformer is still, and Konia is as it was centuries ago. The winding lanes of the town are wide and clean. Every house is surrounded by high walls of

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clay. There are but few women in evidence, and the fez is still there. Western clothes would create a riot.

The centre of the town is the caravanserai, where caravans assemble from all parts of the East. Here traders unload their goods and chant their prayers of thankfulness for a safe journey from behind their bales of merchandise. The men spread their bedding in close proximity to their camels. They squat and inhale from their pipes. One hears the dialect of Samarkand, of Syria, of Kurdish Iraq, of far-off Afghanistan.

As the evening shades creep over the scene the minarets and mosques emerge clearly from the haze of the day. The *imams* intone the evening prayers. The camels, with shuddering regurgitations, expel the slimy water bladders from their throats. There is one incongruous note—one rich khan has achieved a new and wondrous toy. It is a wheezy portable gramophone. The strains of a Scottish dirge come pulsatingly. Set in a minor key, the dirge adds to the weirdness of the occasion.

With the coming of the dawn the setting breaks. The high element of business enters. The pariah dogs are booted into the distance. Small boys, suspiciously near laboriously transported merchandise, are cuffed. Carpets are

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spread. Merchants conjure up an ingratiating smile. They comb their beards and re-light their pipes. They see that the coffee braziers are performing their function. The day is set for bargaining.

Around the merchants cluster the learned. They squat on the ground with pen and ink-horn. They will inscribe letters at a penny per page.

They pen the Arabic characters, beginning on the right of the page and working to the left.

“*Yawash, yawash* (Slowly, slowly),” they will reprimand an impatient merchant anxious to make out a bill.

And the fortune-tellers! They ply a profitable trade.

Merchants consult them before embarking upon the perils of the homeward journey.

They take the hand; they place therein a pinch of red sand, and allow it to trickle slowly away. They finger their beads, they calculate mutteringly, they pull at their beards. They are great readers of character!

Here in Konia is one of the greatest shrines in the whole of Islam—that of Hazrat Molana, one of the most revered saints known to Moslems.

Here, within this sacred shrine, one still finds

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the really authentic Dancing Dervishes. But they perform in a secret chamber. Every Friday these Dervishes, themselves direct descendants of the Prophet, assemble in the Hall of Music, or music-room.

Accompanied by their spiritual head they hold their arms aloft and whirl in ecstasy to the rhythmic music of flutes and the soft, tantalizing roll of diminutive drums. The drums rap out the words of the original poems composed by the Saint.

Round and round whirl these Dervishes, the drums setting a maddening tempo. Faster, faster and yet faster, until the pace becomes delirious.

These men maintain this amazing gyration for twenty minutes. They sink quivering to the ground. The flutes and drums cease their cadences. Without, low, set voices pitched in minor key take up the recitation of the prayers.

Within the shrine, in a perfect state of preservation, are more than a thousand manuscripts. Among them are books actually used by the Saint more than seven hundred years ago. They lay exactly as he left them, open to the very page.

And then, further afield, to the southern confines of the Turkish Republic, I arrived at Adana full of hopes of hearing what my Greek

guide had indicated—the real story of life in the Sultan's Harem.

Here I found lodging in the house of Kasima (or at least I shall give her that name here). She was a grey-haired Circassian lady of remarkable dignity and, despite her years, of unimpeachable carriage.

Kasima met me timidly, for I was one of those beings still to be kept at a safe distance—a man. Many years of incarceration behind the walls of the Sultan's seraglio had rendered her incapable of meeting the world. Ingrained in her mind was a fear of the opposite sex. With a man in close proximity she saw not a male being but the bastinado and other instruments of correction maintained by the chief eunuch for those women of the harem who might momentarily forget that they were the slaves of the Sultan.

Considerably more than a decade has passed since Turkey's Sultan fled precipitately before the advancing forces of the man who is now known as Mustapha Ataturk, President of Turkey, but in thought Kasima still dwells within the harem.

It took me a long time to gain the confidence of Kasima, and still longer to break down the barriers of reserve built up in a life-time's regimental discipline, but at length, with considerable apprehension and much diffidence at

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first, she consented to tell me of her life behind the high and impenetrable walls of the last of the great harems.

In doing so she broke vows of horrific import, and it required a supreme effort of will on her part to realize that nearly twenty years have passed since she passed from the malignant care of the black eunuchs. In her mind's eye she still saw the bared scimitars and the weighted sacks always ready to receive some fair denizen of the harem who had even whispered of its secrets. How many young women were drowned in the Bosphorus because of the tittle-tattling of some disgruntled eunuch, only the Sultans know.

Her story is, therefore, unique, and in a sense largely historical, for few have dared to speak of the harem except in the abstract, and certainly no harem woman has ever before bared herself of such intriguing reminiscences.

When I first began to delve into Kasima's story my interest was idle, but as she gradually weaved a pattern of intrigue, hate, passion and unbridled luxury, I realized that I was listening to more than polite conversation.

Here, indeed, was revelation, and I considered it my duty to preserve her story, and commit it to writing.

I, although a Student, had entertained an

entirely erroneous impression of the Sultan's harem; and I imagine that my impression was and is a general one. So inviolable has been the secrecy which has cloaked the private lives of the Sultans that an imperfect picture was bound to arise in the minds of the uninitiated.

To me the harem had been a huge palace replete with every feminine luxury, in which were congregated numbers of beautiful women, all highly perfumed, all attired in priceless silks, and all mistresses of coquetry, and all awaiting the pleasure of their royal master.

Kasima speedily dispelled this picture.

She told me a loosely-woven story of her parents—they were peasants, and very poor. She remembered still with a vague pride that she was the youthful belle of the hamlet—for girls come to maturity quickly in the hills of Circassia. There had been the shy, sheep-like glances of the youths, and the more direct ogglings of the older men, and because once she had smiled at an audacious sally her father had beaten her. Her mother had wept, but there came a long journey in a rough, springless cart drawn by two white, long-horned oxen, then—the sale.

Dimly she recalled her first reactions to her lot. When her father bade her farewell she cried, even though he had beaten her. Roughly

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he had told her that she had no cause for tears, for was she not lucky, and favoured above all other girls? Had not the stars been set in her favour when her fair skin had been spied by the Sultan's agent, and was she not herself now an *ikbal* (a bright star of the firmament) in that inspection had shown her form to be exquisite and worthy of royal attention?

She had withdrawn from her father terror-stricken at his words. Into the Circassian hills had percolated stories of the Sultan's Harem in Istanbul, and they were not nice. It was said that girls were handed over to the executioner for immersion in the Bosphorus for the slightest misdemeanour; that the soles of one's feet were bastinadoed on the smallest pretext; that one's every action was spied upon by gigantic negro eunuchs, and that the walls of the palace were those of a gilded prison, beyond which an inmate never escaped except in death.

There were stories built upon centuries of rumour and innuendo, and it was widely believed that the Sultans were men whose appetite for feminine beauty was insatiable, and that this appetite was inflamed almost to the degree of imbecility.

That this widely-believed story had some basis in fact is known, for more than one Sultan was kept in feminine subjection by such dubious

means. Usually it was the monarch's own mother who connived at this state of affairs, for in the harem the mother is pre-eminent and above all other women, and with a son rendered weak and unstable by vice and continued excess, power naturally passed into the hands of the mother.

There was, for instance, the noteworthy case of Murad III, who gathered together a harem so numerous that even Solomon with all his wives would have been nonplussed. He produced one hundred and three children according to the palace archives, and an unknown number where the importance of the temporary consort did not warrant the dignity of an official record.

When Murad III died there were twenty sons and twenty-seven daughters still living—the remainder had died mysterious deaths. The eldest son of the twenty—later to be known as Muhammed III—in order to make certain that none of his brothers should make a pass for the throne, put the whole nineteen to death. And to make doubly sure that there should be no future male claimants he rounded up seven of his father's concubines who had been declared pregnant, and had them sewn up in weighted sacks. At dead of night they were thrown into the Marmora.

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This was the atmosphere into which Kasima was to be so suddenly plunged. Little wonder that she recoiled with horror at the thought.

She saw herself in Istanbul penned up with other recruits for the royal bedchamber; she envisaged a scene where she was bedecked with the finest raiment and ready for the dire moment of a monarch's lustful debauchery. Vividly she conjured up hysterical scenes in the Sultan's apartments, for she resolved that she would never tamely submit her body to the attentions of a libertine. Rather would she die. . . .

How different was the reality!

Filled with the most poignant emotions, she was carried to Istanbul. She was ushered past the gigantic negro eunuchs on duty at the various gates, and she found herself, not in the role of concubine, with a galaxy of slaves to massage and perfume her body, but a maker of coffee and, as she was speedily informed, a very indifferent one!

Curiously enough this sudden tumbling of the ogre's castle of her dreams piqued her. When chided because of the noxious character of the brew she had produced in the name of Mocha coffee, she turned upon her tormentor and informed her, with childish downrightness, that she had been brought all the way from

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Circassia to delight the Sultan, and not to act as a menial.

The beautifully-groomed *kiaya* who was her task-mistress laughed loudly at this sally, then turned upon the unfortunate Kasima and rent her.

“What was she—an uncouth village hoyden—to aspire to such greatness. In time perhaps—when Kasima had been taught the ways of court; and had learned something of deportment and of court etiquette, she might dream of such an honour, and if the stars were beneficent, she might even attain her desire, but for the moment she had to learn—she had to be trained—and her immediate task was to make coffee and—make it well.”

There was much more in the same strain, and Kasima smiled faintly at the recollection of her youthful presumption.

Kasima explained further. Completely she wrecked my preconceived notion of a palace peopled by idle, bored, lethargic beauties, waiting, waiting for a summons.

She told me much of the interior economy of the harem, and she explained what a complicated institution it really was, a place where occupation was found for all and none was allowed merely to fritter away time.

The most powerful woman in the old Otto-

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man Empire was the Sultan's mother. Her place in the State was unique, and no mere wife or concubine of the Sultan, no matter the degree of his infatuation, could supplant her. She gave up the reins of her office only when she died. This woman, known as the Sultan Validé, queened it over all other and none could dispute her will. In the old Ottoman hierarchy had she not been selected for the highest honour to which any person might aspire? Was she not the custodian of the monarch's most cherished treasures—not his immense wealth, or his priceless jewels, but that which transcended all—his women?

It was the Sultan Validé who wielded all power within the harem, and though Kasima had to shrink back and efface herself when this great lady passed, it was really she who indicated how she should spend her hours, what tasks she should perform, and even what clothes she should wear.

Below the Sultan Valide were *kadins*, or concubines who had attained the position of wives by bearing the Sultan a son. These women had magnificent apartments, and were regarded and treated as queens. Kasima had much to say of the *kadins*, and I will write more of them anon.

Below the *kadins* were other women who had been shown preferment—women who had at-

tended the royal bedchamber but had failed to provide the Sultan with offspring and who, as a slight recompense for the dignity and the opulence which they had so narrowly missed, had been awarded appointments within the harem. Thus there were the *kiaya*, or Controller of the harem, the Treasurer, the Keeper of the Baths, the Mistress of the Robes, the Keeper of the Jewels, and a dozen like.

Below all were newcomers like Kasima. Kasima was attached to the entourage of the *kiaya*, and there were dozens of other girls, some under the *kiaya*, others under the tutelage of the Mistress of the Robes, and still more in the service of other women principals.

All the girls were required to work. Some, like Kasima, were required to try their 'prentice hands at culinary efforts; others embroidered and stitched at the fine silks which adorned the *kadins*; others kept in repair the priceless rugs and carpets—there was work enough for all.

You will notice in this brief sketch of the harem's interior economy that Kasima has so far not mentioned the eunuchs, except in passing. That is because the eunuchs, while of the harem, were an organization apart.

Responsible only to the Sultan Validé was the Chief Eunuch, and though he worked under the orders of the Sultan's mother, it was really

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he, and he alone, who was responsible for the good behaviour of the harem's inmates. Should anything untoward occur, the Sultan could hardly chide his august mother. The Chief Eunuch was there for this purpose, but his power over the girls was real and sometimes terrible.

At his service were other eunuchs—dozens of them—and they provided the secret service organization which kept the Sultan Validé acquainted with all that transpired, on the one hand, and the Sultan on the other, for the Chief Eunuch had direct access to the monarch and, indeed, was his channel of communication between the throne and the concubines and concubines-to-be.

Kasima told me how the Chief Eunuch and his underlings could make or mar the life of any woman. A word whispered into the ear of the Sultan and priceless riches and the dignity of queenhood were perhaps the girl's perquisites.

A vitriolic innuendo whispered into the ear of the Sultan Valide, and a girl was selected for the most menial tasks, was garbed in unattractive attire, and perhaps even beaten.

It is obvious, in an atmosphere such as this, with a personnel almost preponderantly feminine—and feminine to the degree at which all thoughts were concentrated upon the volup-

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tuous—that intrigue and hatred and unbridled emotion should be the accepted order of the day.

Kasima told me much of this. Her stories amazed me. They were outrageously bizarre, yet starkly simple. They both appalled me and excited my interest for more.

After waiting three days, during which time my passport was to be properly examined, I left Adana for French Syria.

The scene changed as one jostled along now on a protesting camel southward, for from here I was travelling with a camel caravan, and had discarded my European clothes.

The women are subtly different. Most of them are unveiled. They sit, shapeless forms, precariously perched upon donkeys. Children share their voluminous laps with the latest offspring of the family goat.

The men have clipped beards and longer noses. There is a curious pinkness in their complexions.

The camel, too, largely gives place to the dromedary.

Here there is no statue of Mustapha Kemal. The Ghazi is but a name.

MY CARAVAN IN ALLAH'S DAWN

CHAPTER III

MY CARAVAN IN ALLAH'S DAWN

THERE IS magic, there is romance, in Turkey. Syria was once Turkey.

Whereas I might have lost the sense of unreality and of fantasy of the kingdom of the Sultans upon passing through a frontier post into Syria, yet I found myself plunged into a different sort of adventure—an adventure in which a son of Asia dressed as one of the people and perched on the back of a camel, views the ancient East in its true colour and beauty.

Look at my caravan! It has the best part of a hundred miles of caravan route to cover till I can arrive in Aleppo. By a train journey I could have reached my journey's end much earlier and travelled in greater comfort: but I neither wanted too much comfort, nor desired to reach any given region too soon. So I chose the caravan route.

And imagine our camel train trampling a carpet of living gold all day beneath a sky of brightest turquoise!

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I have frequently heard men speak of the weariness of the desert, of its changelessness which breeds the discontent of satiety, as does the sea, yet I have never experienced the slightest ennui on this account. Why? Well, the caravan is much too varied in its personnel and its continual diversity to make for dullness.

For travelling in a caravan is like marching in a picture—a large and lustrous painting, one of those rich and rare canvasses one sees only in public galleries and never in private houses. And you feel you are always in the centre of the picture, its brightest spot, and never near the edge of the frame. Around you is scattered the whole wealth and brilliance of the artist's palette—the most amazing greens from the dye-vats of Damascus, reds and scarlets which could only have come from the Bosphorus, the delicate hues of Persian prayer rugs. You nourish a feeling that you have emerged from the sunrise with all its colours about you, enfolding you, drenching you. And through the hours you are trampling billows of gold-dust. Boredom! The man who could feel bored in such a progress as this would walk disinterested through the courts and gardens of Paradise.

And the progress of my caravan is as replete with surprises as the voyage of a ship through

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some archipelago of the sun. Once a day at least the green islands of oases lift their coasts above the yellow waves of sand, beckoning just as do islands in the Pacific or Caribbean. And like a ship the caravan approaches them, its leading camel with its arched neck seeming the figure-head on the prow.

The best hour in which to arrive at an oasis is the hottest hour of the day, when noon is pouring down its vertical vigours. There is a sense of instant relief on entering the province of the palm, such as a man blinded by lights feels on entering a shuttered room.

Cool, green avenues shut out the blaze, friendly waters irrigate the blood, and one feels the flesh returning to its norm of temperature and ease. It is only when one leaves the desert for a space, not when one is still drenched in its vitality, that one realizes that it has taken its toll of one's strength.

But, I repeat, it is the gallantry of cavalcade and colour which frees the traveller in the caravan from any sense of weariness. As well ask a knight in armour if he ever felt the weight of his panoply when on journey errant, or the opera star if he or she wilts from the stifling heat of the theatre, the oppression of medieval make-up or the arid bareness of back-stage.

I was part of a pageant, of a procession, and

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processions never feel fatigue. I was a unit in a "crowded hour of glorious life."

I and my camel were one, I was a centaur of the desert stalking upon the shoulders of a great beast to nowhere or somewhere, and I did not care when I arrived there, or if I ever arrived at all. The whole business began to take on the consistency and appearance of a golden dream, in which the elements are a yellow carpet, an azure canopy, splashes of rainbow colours and the smell of camels. And it was one of those dreams of which the actuality is more gallant and desirous, more marvellous and satisfying, than the retrospect.

Day after day we rode on or marched by the sides of our camels, singing desert songs, kneeling to prayer five times a day, and at the close of the day going to bed either in a khan, or merely under the roof that Allah made on the mattress of soft sand: but at least one caravan-serai—a rest house—and its life I would describe here.

A walled quadrangle it was, where men and beasts of our caravan, now not very far from Aleppo, entered for a night's rest. Around the walls, low-roofed rooms, or mere cells, were hurriedly occupied by merchants of the caravan: and the muleteers preferred to sleep in the open.

When I was sweeping on the mud floor of my

cell, the Mullah of Konia, who shared it with me, felt annoyed: "Brother, you are wasteful of time!" He clutched me by the elbow. "Dust is what our bodies are made of: human flesh will become dust: why, then, be so particular about touching a thing of which you must ultimately become a part!" He ranged me beside him for the evening prayer.

Everyone had kindled a fire: we cooked dried-up meat mixed with millet; for our pudding we had bought dry dates from the keeper of the *serai*: and then Sultan, the famous Syrian storyteller, was persuaded to relate a tale of long ago, till the half-moon shimmered in a sapphire sky and stars seem to hang down the sky like giant luminous bunches of grapes.

But although it is late, and the last prayer of the night has been said, there is expectancy upon every countenance. We gather round a big fire in the centre of the *serai*. A contest is going to take place—a cock fight!

The moon in the little square shines gloriously down on a scene of miniature bloodshed which would have infuriated the apostles of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Voci-ferous peasants, for once aroused out of their stoic calm, hold their fighting cocks in their hands, displaying their points, their business-like looking beaks, and their armoured spurs.

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A circle was made and the fighting commenced, to a sudden fall to silence.

A bulky fellow with a strangely childish face launched a small but wicked-looking bird at a much larger feathered champion deposited on the hot stones by a feeble old patriarch who looked saintly enough to be a fakir in some up-country shrine.

The cocks advanced with gusto, clashed, rose in the air, screaming and mad with blood-lust, the feathers on their necks standing out stiffly. The larger bird made ponderous lunges at his smaller adversary, but the little fellow was by far the spryer, and even in mid-air seemed to be able to dodge his adversary.

Small spots of blood began to fall upon the pavement. The yells of the onlookers grew frantic. Bets were freely exchanged, and those who wagered seemed by the expression on their faces to be convulsed with anxiety as to the result.

It came so suddenly that I for one was surprised. After an agitated spring in the air, the birds came to earth again, and as they landed the beak of the smaller transfixes the jugular vein of the larger. Down dropped the mass of fury and feathers like a stone, dead as Gengis Khan himself, his tinted finery of plumage dabbled with his life-blood.

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A roar of acclamation followed, and the successful betters rushed upon their less fortunate fellow-sportsmen.

But the succeeding match was a much more protracted affair. In this the cocks were of much the same size and quality, nor did they seem to be nearly so keen as their predecessors. Cursing in their disappointment, the onlookers hurled objurgations at the hapless birds and their owners, who appeared frantic at the turn things had taken.

At last the time-keeper, who had been keeping time by some method of his own, stepped in and declared the match null and void and all bets off. And so pair after pair were loosed upon each other until the stones were scarlet as the combs of the combatants, and the grand final match was fought, till the armed watchmen had ascended their tower, and yelled a command to all to disperse, and the gates of the *serai* were being bolted for the night.

At dawn the caravan started: and indeed what a wondrous start!

There is shouting of drivers down the long irregular line—how it reminds one of the calling of newsboys in a London street—and the camels rise from their knees with the ungainly hesitation of their kind. A swirl of sand eddies away with the light morning breeze and leaves the

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picture of the slowly-moving caravan unblurred.

And what a picture! There is a music in its slow and graceful motion, and as you watch it your heart frames a tune to accompany it—something like the ballet music in Schubert's "Rosamunde", something that will permit of an *obbligato* of bells and cymbals. I have seen screen movie pictures of caravans in motion, but I can assure you that they bear a very faint resemblance to the actual thing.

To begin with, they are nearly always synthetic affairs, a producer's idea of "the Orient", and again they lack the abounding colour and fantastic accompaniment and emanation of the true caravan. For just as real poetry carries with it in its flow and passion a light above the line, which is not to be found in that which is not poetry, and is invisible to those who have not the secret of poetry, so the rich wonder and surprise of the caravan in motion can be comprehended only by him who has the East in his heart and who knows its incommunicable word.

Yet not more than a few minutes ago all this beauty was flattened to the earth, undistinguished, almost sordid in appearance. It is as though a moving flower-garden had suddenly arisen from a bed of toadstools. These arching necks, that rhythmic stalking, these fluttering

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scarfs and cloaks, were only a moment past a huddle of limbs and weaving upon the desert's dusty face. This marvellous silhouette, picked out in reds, greens and blues, was cast into squatting circles, surrounded by greasy pots, broken food and heaps of baggage.

What magic has transformed it so suddenly? Surely the marvel of the kaleidoscope, which out of a few shards of coloured glass is capable of making itself over and over again into Arabian shapes and patterns of mathematical loveliness. For there is something mathematical in all the beauty of the East. It is this which men have discovered, or think they have discovered, in the New Art, this abandon of patterning, this endless capacity to conceive, consciously or unconsciously, design after design in recurring and orderly sequence and which is to be observed in the mural decoration of all Moslem lands. So the caravan arranges and disposes itself against the desert background into a score of shifting patterns and outlines as it moves, but always with a strange decision of flux, like the moving of water into destined channels. Now it appears as a long line spread across sandhills, ghostly, spiritual; again a thickening mass of movement in some hollow, the most material of mounted crowds, yet bearing even in its most commonplace aspect

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something of that spell of the unusual which associates things Oriental with the spirit of Otherwhere.

Far behind it the caravan leaves a little knot of friends and relatives who have come to see its personnel depart. These are waving hands, just as in the case of the setting forth of a great liner, for if the camel is "the ship of the desert", the caravan is its Armada.

We are away on the move to the White City called Aleppo.

Aleppo!

The name is sufficiently alluring—how disappointing is the reality.

A dozen conquerors have ravaged the city since 854 B.C., and until a dozen years ago the setting was essentially Eastern. Aleppo was once one of the greatest marts in world trade. The fame of its bazaars spread even to far-off Gaul.

The city is now a mass of architecture erected in approved Continental style. There are many shops where there were once bazaars, and each displays Western wares. The recent Chicago Exhibition had more of the Orient to offer than has Aleppo!

Apart from this evidence of the French occupation, there are the jet black troops of the French Colonial forces. These men understand

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little Arabic, and the people of Aleppo love them as the wild Druses of the mountains love the white conqueror.

There is, of course, still the ancient city, clustered around the immense Citadel. This massive structure is littered with ruins. Dogs, goats and donkeys drink from what were once ornate marble baths. Black negroid soldiers use the stones of a dilapidated mosque on which to wash their clothes.

Within the Citadel there is a grotesque ruin. The gateway still stands. It bears still the inscription of Sultan Salahuddin (the great Saladin). The Colonial troops cook their meals therein.

From Aleppo to Antioch! The way is under gates, arches and upon roads built by the Romans!

And Antioch, the wondrous creation of Seleucus Nicator. Could this great builder arise, would he recognize his handiwork of two thousand years ago?

When I limped into the city, two donkeys were pulling a rubbish cart beside the site of the Palace of Trajan, where once tiny gold chariots, pulled by turtle doves, carried red roses between the monarch and his queen.

The double colonnades which were once each side of the streets lie forlorn in the dust.

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Some of the columns are broken and split. Others are as when they were first erected.

The beautiful stream of Orentes, with its cascades and its waterfalls, still flows. The crocuses grow wild along its banks. They peep, here and there, from some Roman sarcophagus, hundreds of which lie half buried in the sands of time.

As I wanted to have a tour round Antioch on my own, I resolved to stay in a caravanserai for a number of days and to look round at liesure. The place gripped me.

The *serai* keeper at Antioch was a character. They had thought that he was mad—at least, half mad. He was not a Syrian by birth but a Kurd—a Kurdish blacksmith, he told me. When I have related his story to you, you can judge whether he was sane or otherwise. Funnier things than that happen in the world. But Attaji's story is amazing.

Attaji the smith, now the inn-keeper, made knives and shod horses for a nest of villages in his highland home in Kurdistan. Also he composed songs to which the folk listened in the summer nights when the work among the fields and herds was at an end—ballads which had done strange work in the heart of many a moon-eyed girl, songs of war which had quickened the blood of the lithe youths who gathered round

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the forge when its glowing ashes seemed the reflection of the sunset.

When all is said, what power can equal that of a song? A song can wind itself about the heart of a woman as the jungle plant around the tree above it; it can wrap the spirit of a man until at last it seems the very man himself. It is a magic against which not even the wisest can strive. Once the song of a great poet invades the blood, not for many days can its power be cast out; for years, maybe, it remains, haunting the brain with the lilt and strangeness of it.

Attaji had made such a song of the Sangan, a swift, mysterious rhythm which told of a wondrous paradise of unearthly delights lying high up among the loftier valleys beneath the snow-line. For years, ever since he had been a boy, indeed, he had dreamed of such a blessed place; in spirit he had climbed above the black pine-woods in search of it, in his heart he had found it; the greater part of his life, waking and sleeping, was spent in the contemplation of it, until at last it had become so real to him, that he had regarded it as the true reality and his daily life of toil among the strokes of hammers and the stamping of horses, as a something shadowy and remote.

What is more strange, almost the entire village, nay, the whole range of villages beneath

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the Sangan, had been so bewitched by the song that nearly every man, woman and child accepted it as truth, rather than the imaginings of a rustic ballad-maker. To them the glamorous vale high up on the shoulders of Sangan was no mere legend, but a haven of reality, a rich and fruitful region of roseate arbours and whispering streams where limbs tired with labour in the harsh brown fields might recline as in the garden of the Prophet itself, and glowing fruits might be plucked from the boughs of enchanted trees of which man had not yet eaten.

Two only among the folk of the plain, derided the song of Attaji—Hassan the Fierce and Assha, the daughter of old Rustam, the chief headman of the district. It was not in the heart of Hassan to praise any man or his deed. He it was who led the men of the region when they went on foray. In time of peace he did little but gallop from house to house on his black stallion, jeering at the men and pressing his brutal attentions on the girls. Everyone in the countryside feared him, all but Attaji the smith, for he was the strongest man in the hill-lands, with a tongue as keen as the edge of severed glass, a mind and heart that longed only for the rush and tempest of the foray. To such a man, the song of the smith was merely a thing of legend, the dream of a madman's imagination.

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Nor could Assha credit the strain. Fair as she was, the most beautiful among all the girls of the plain, the spirit of romance had never passed between the doors of her heart. In the smith she saw only a gallant, if somewhat dreamy, young man. Again and yet again Attaji had shown his preference for her, had laid his loveliest songs at her feet like wreaths of flowers. But they had touched her scarcely at all. Perhaps the shadow of the snows above had fallen upon her soul too heavily to give her to understand their divine and rapturous beauty. Hassan also had made it more than plain that he would have her to wife, but to him also she was cold, misliking the red fire in his wolfish eyes and the railing note of his evil tongue.

On one of the earliest evenings of summer the village was gathered, as was its wont, around the forge of the smith. Once more the folk had demanded the magic song of the mountain paradise, once more Attaji had sung it with his accustomed fervour. The great, swinging, melodious lines poured from his lips like a golden stream as he told of the happy valley where time was not, of orchards illuminated with choicest fruits which hung like great jewels among the tenting leaves, of the gentle wooing of delicious streams, of the rapture of rest which

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environed this duchy of his delight, where woe never came, and toil and heartsickness were not.

As the song ended a great hush fell upon the people. Then suddenly the mocking voice of Hassan the Fierce rose upon a peal of savage laughter from where he sat on his black stallion behind the circle of listeners.

"By Allah, smith, you grow more mad with the passing of every summer. This delectable valley of yours, my friend, is only a fool's paradise, like the mirage of a man drunken with hashish."

A frown slowly gathered upon the broad brow of the smith as he stared at the disturber of his dreams.

"You lie, wolf," he said scornfully. "It is not given to such as you to comprehend the mystery of such things as that of which I speak."

"Mystery, my benighted shoer of steeds," cried Hassan fiercely, "there, by the beard of the Prophet, you speak truth at least. Mystery enow, for, by my soul, this garden of yours among the heights is as false and idle a thing as the tales one hears in the bazaars in Kabul, a lie, the drivel of childish lips."

"It is no lie," returned Attaji almost as fiercely, "though to thee, wretch, it may well seem one, whose only heaven is a cattle-pen filled with beasts stolen from peasants who cannot fight."

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"Then, friend," said Hassan, with suspicious courtesy, "why do you not seek this radiant valley of which you sing? What ails you that your feet have not long since borne you upward to its delights? Or perhaps you wait for wings, or until such time as the girl of your choice will take heart of grace and accompany you in your pilgrimage?"

The girls tittered, for Attaji's preference for the maiden Assha was notorious. The smith flushed scarlet. His great hand seized upon a hammer which lay on the edge of the anvil beside which he stood. But he loosed his hold with a gesture of disdain.

"Nay, then, I will take you at your word, son of Sheitan," he cried, as if beside himself. "If the maiden Assha will pledge herself to me, should I climb the mountain-valley and find it, I ask nothing better."

"And if you do not find it, you will resign her?" asked Hassan eagerly.

"For ever."

"What say you, Assha?" The bandit turned to the girl, who lay on the green turf in the listless attitude of one who deigns not to listen to the empty words of her inferiors. After a pause she spoke, even more scornfully than either of her suitors, it seemed to all.

"Truly, if Attaji gains his paradise, I will

assent," she murmured, "for I am persuaded, Hassan, that it is as you say, a thing of idle dreams."

Next morning Attaji set out to scale Sangan in search of his delectable valley. So sure was he of reaching it that he took with him only a loaf of the millet bread his mother baked and a gourd of goat's milk. The villagers watched him as he slowly ascended the first slopes and foothills of the mighty range. Soon he was lost in the dark pinewoods which skirt the heights in mid-mountain.

Attaji trudged slowly upward, for he was too practised a hillman to fatigue himself needlessly. After a time the path ceased, for higher than the line where lost sheep or goats could find herbage the herds who sought them seldom mounted. So far, indeed even farther, he had often climbed before, but by late afternoon he had reached the limits of his experience. Now he was confronted by an impassable face of rock which barred his advance as effectively as might the retaining wall of the Palace at Kabul. He reconnoitred it first on one flank, then on another, for some distance, without finding any opening. At last, just as he was growing anxious, he observed a gap just large enough to admit a man where the scarp overlapped sufficiently to hide the opening from all but a careful seeker.

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Through this he clambered, and saw before him at a distance of more than half a mile a second rock-face, own brother to the first.

And the second scarp had a man-wide opening, and a third was behind it, and by the time Attaji had reached the fourth cincture of stone, so weary was he that he did not even look to see what lay beyond, but sank down on the hard earth and was almost at once lost in the shadows of sleep.

When he woke at last it was late morning. Before him the breast of the mountain seemed to shelve downward in descent and the height above it to assume almost the likeness of a canopy. For hundreds of feet the side of Sangan raced downward and away from its own slope, like a deep gash such as a hasty man might make in a cheese with a great knife. And far down in the depths and plunge of it Attaji could see, like the shadows, trees and houses and the tiny shapes of men walking and cattle browsing on long races of emerald turf.

Fresh and restored by sleep and the last of his provender, Attaji began to hasten towards the scene below him. He ran, he bounded like an ibex in his rapture of discovery. As he covered the intervening space, he saw more clearly the outlines of the valley beneath him and the folk who peopled it. He redoubled his pace, in his

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joy he called to the men below him. Then, suddenly, the cries of satisfaction died upon his lips, he hesitated in his course, stopped dead. Terrified, he gazed with stony eyes upon the scene beneath. Then, after staring at what he saw in dread for some moments, he turned away and began to ascend the hill with rapid strides and closed eyes.

For some days the folk of the village thought little of Attaji's continued absence. The Sangar was great, and any who chose to explore it might wander across the breast of it for many days. Only they knew that he had taken but a day's provender with him, and those who loved him and his songs trembled.

Meanwhile, Hassan the Fierce rode from village to village, his mouth filled with jeers at the expense of Attaji. But Assha was silent and when people mentioned his name in her hearing said not a word.

And on the fifth day from that on which he had set forth, Attaji returned. He walked like an old man, his eyes seemed to look inward, as he made his way to the forge. The folk clustered round him. Hassan cantered up on his black stallion, a leer on his bearded face. Assha resumed her place on the green turf among the girls.

There was a long, long silence, which no one

seemed wishful to break, not even Hassan. At last one of the very youngest of the maidens crept to the smith's feet where he sat cross-legged beside his forge.

"Attaji," she asked gently out of her innocence, "did you find the valley of your song?"

The smith turned his head ever so little and looked at her so strangely that the child shrank from him as only girlhood can shrink from the unknown and the terrible. Then Attaji spoke:

"Aye, child," he said at last, after a dreadful pause, and the voice of him seemed as the croak of a raven, "aye, child, I found my valley . . . But it was not such as I had dreamed of."

So terrible was the fall of the simple words that not a soul spoke. For long Attaji said nothing more, then, at last, as if some inner power urged him to speech, he continued. In the hush which accompanied his words you could have heard the dropping of a bead from a woman's necklace upon the grass.

"I climbed Sangan, and made my way through little gaps in many walls of sheer rock like the sallyports in the old castles which crown our hills. I slept. With morning I saw a vast cleft in the belly of the mountain. Downward it raced for many hundreds of feet. And I could see trees and houses and the shapes of men and women.

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"With joy in my heart I pressed forward. But as I neared the place it seemed familiar. The houses were the houses I knew, even the houses of this very village. The people I saw turned their faces towards me. They were the folk of this village. And the first face I recognized was . . . my own.

"And I saw thee, Hassan, and thee, Assha, and the rest. All who are here I saw. . . ."

"Hearken not to him, my friends," cried Hassan. "By the Prophet's mantle, the man is as mad as Sohrab in the Persian poem. Bind him fast with ropes and away with him ere he bewitch us with his evil words."

But none stirred, for all were bespelled by the tale of the smith. On and on went the croaking voice, as it ground out its terrible odyssey.

"And I knew there is nothing single in the world, that men and beasts and all things that are made by men have their likenesses and reflections elsewhere, and that these have as much life as we, wherefore come our dreams and our imaginings of life in another place."

"It was a vision," hesitated one, an old man. "You were sore beset by hunger, Attaji, and your wits wandered."

"Nay, I was never stronger in life," said the smith wearily. "But now I am weighed down by the knowledge I have and the thought that

MY CARAVAN IN ALLAH'S DAWN

I am twin with something of the soul of me, which lives and lurks far up on the side of Sangan. And I can never disbelieve in the goodness of Allah any more, and can but wish I were dead."

Attaji the smith rose and went from among the folk, no man hindering him, and without another word to any he wandered unsteadily across the fields, none knew whither. Nor was he ever seen again in the hill country. He is now in Antioch.

Take the story for what it is worth, for I have met the man, and a peculiar light in his eyes as he related the story seemed certainly to have something of otherworldliness.

SONS OF OLD SYRIA

CHAPTER IV

SONS OF OLD SYRIA

NO TOUR of Antioch is complete without going from the modern town and walking in and out of the ancient Antioch that was: that means on the plateau of the hill where most of the celebrated remains lie.

The one in which I particularly delighted was the Old Wall. Beginning from the river below it rides up to the hills and works its course on and upwards. The earthquake of 1872 destroyed every vestige of it on the plain, but up in the hills it remains in fragments to tell the tale of its glory in bygone days.

Built of limestone in the exterior, its cavities are filled up by rough stones. At places, such as near the aqueduct, it may be as thick as ten feet, so that a carriage and pair could drive over it. At one time there were as many as 360 three-storied towers at frequent intervals of fifty or sixty feet, each tower rising to eighty feet.

Beginning again on the western side, I saw

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the beautiful aqueduct bridging the valley, and, continuing to go round, one reaches the Bab-ul-Hadid or the Iron Gate. Near this point the wall bridges a deep valley, and at the lower end it is more or less open to allow the passage of the waters during winter months.

Round again, and I took a road or a track to a remarkable region called the House of Water. By midday I was at Bait-ul-Ma where a Sheikh of considerable importance received me in his encampment. After a hurried meal of camel meat and dates for pudding, I started to look around the locality.

A remarkable series of waterfalls delights one's eye here. Amongst the rich vegetation of the hillside I saw threads of slender waterfalls flash like a sword at one spot, and looking on the other side I saw gigantic falls sparkling like melted precious stones tumbling over each other to reach the glassy water of Orentes far below.

Climbing up or coming down the hillsides, I came across many sarcophagi peering out of the dust of ages, and pieces of columns could be seen here and there waiting to tell the story of Roman power and grandeur.

A grotto attracted my attention, and as I wanted to descend a long flight of stone steps the Sheikh yelled out:

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"This is the den of Satan!" he pulled at my sleeve. "The mother of Satan may be there even as I speak."

He was acting according to the local Arab legend that these caves are infested with evil spirits, and at night light is seen to emerge therefrom which "floats over the hills and the desert, and enveloping an unmarried woman would make her demented."

The Sheikh has had many experiences with women, and in respect to these unfortunate experiences he thought that he could always associate the influence of the grotto with the temperament of the women of the desert.

As nothing more could be seen that day around the House of Water, I sat beside the Sheikh in his black tent while his Abyssinian slave poured water on my hands, and rice in which large pieces of camel's meat was cooked, was placed before us as our evening repast.

After this dinner, around the camp fire, the Sheikh engaged me in a conversation about women.

"Women are evil," he observed.

"Not all!" I objected.

"More than most!" he insisted.

The Sheikh turned to me meditatively.

"Tell me, traveller," he said, "tell me—you have been in Wilahat (England)—is it true

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that one can procure a wife for seven shillings and sixpence?"

I gazed at the Sheikh in astonishment.

"Is it not true," he proceeded, noticing my air of amazement, "that one can obtain a licence for seven shillings and sixpence from the Government and that thereafter one may take a wife?"

Enlightenment came to me.

"Not take a wife in the literal sense," I was in some haste to explain. "The marriage licence does not confer upon the Englishman the right to go into the highways and byways and seize the first woman that takes his eye."

The Sheikh gave a grunt of disappointment.

"I thought it was so simple," he said. "I thought it was all part of this Western civilization. I have read that a white man pays this small sum for his wife and then there is the expression 'taking to wife'."

With some difficulty I explained the idiosyncrasies of the English tongue. I explained that whereas in the parlance of England the man "took" the wife, in reality it was the wife who did the taking and continued to do so until she died.

"Mumph," he muttered, as he stroked his beard. "Seemingly there is little difference between the desert and this wonderful London."

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"Take the case of this disgruntled woman," he went on mournfully. "In order to get her I had to pay her tight-fisted father three camels, fourteen goats and much silver. I heap compliments upon her and show her preference above my other wives. You see a little of her tantrums."

I could hear her throwing pots and pans at a woman slave.

"She was as sweet as the bees' honey but an hour or two gone and as soft as a ministering angel. She desires one of those gold-fringed dresses which come from Damascus. The dresses of my wives are fringed with silver. I explained that were I to procure for her one with gold, there would be bickerings and much trouble.

"Would she see reason? You observe that she would not."

He puffed heavily.

"Three camels, fourteen goats, and . . ."

He ended on a dolorous note.

"How do you actually get your wives in the desert?" I asked in order to turn the subject.

"When a sheikh of the desert decides to take unto himself a wife," said the Sheikh, "he lets the fact be known," and he continued: "Soon he is told that there is a comely girl whose hand is ready for marriage in such and such town or

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encampment. He is given an indication of the price he will have to pay.

"He might haggle over that which he must pay a rapacious father, but at no time until the girl is his is he vouchsafed a view of her face. That much must he take on trust.

"Sometimes the comeliness is not all that it is made out to be and the new husband feels aggrieved. Then there is born a feud of the desert which, more often than not, is wiped out in blood." He spoke of his duel with a rival sheikh on that score.

"There is not much romance in this, you might say." He eyed me. "Well, Allah knows there is not. Sometimes, however, romance comes into these affairs with the dash and flashing of scimitars, and the chivalry of our early history is reborn.

"These young women of the desert, especially those of surpassing beauty, whose fathers have settled in the cities, have been known to gaze from a tessellated marble window when a gay young sheikh of the desert has been passing. They have shrunk back in horror when masculine eyes have gazed into theirs and had more than a momentary glance at their beauty. Such was the case with my friend Sheikh ul Arabi.

"He dwells not far from Aleppo, and had

good fortune such as this, and the fire of longing raged within his heart.

"Often he passed that window again, but the young lady knew well how she should play her part. Oft-times he heard her singing and playing upon the stringed instruments of the harem, but he was denied a further sight of her.

"Of course, he made inquiries, and his quest seemed hopeless. The girl, he was informed, because of her beauty, had been sought far and wide and she was actually destined for a rich old sheikh who had out-bidden his competitors and who already had a plethora of wives.

"This was too much for my friend ul Arabi.

"One night when there was no moon, famous Syrian trotting camels appeared beneath the loved one's window. The Sheikh, with the aid of a ladder made from a leaning palm, made the perilous ascent. Curiously enough, the window was open.

"The girl asleep upon her couch shrank back in alarm when his touch awakened her, but she did not scream.

"There was the semblance of a struggle, but when my friend told me the story, Allah be my witness, I could but reflect that it could not have been a serious resistance which the maiden offered, for the descent of the crazy ladder was accomplished in safety.

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“The trotting camels did the rest, and the pair were soon away in the vast confines of the desert.

“And a happy union it proved to be, even though the Sheikh, honourable man that he was, practically beggared himself over a period of years in order to pay the dowry.

“He stole the girl of his dreams, but no one was going to say that he was a thief, or that he stole because he could not obtain a wife by more accepted means.

“Often the desert wives gravitate to the realm of matrimony through the channels of the slave markets which are still held in various parts of the hinterland. My best wife, who was my best love, was a slave-girl—a Kurdish girl—may Allah reward her with his best palace in Paradise, for she was the mother of my heir.”

Continuing my journey back to Antioch, and thence due eastwards, striking the chains of hills, I arrived at a village of Harim. The place has an atmosphere of Arabian Nights’ dreams.

Perched on the crest of a hill is a castle of superb beauty: chambers open into chambers, rock-hewn stairs appear at surprising places, and the pageant of the Crusades drifts before your mind’s eye. When the great conqueror Nurradin defeated the Franks here seven hundred and seventy-five years ago, the fort must

have been a centre of great magnificence: but soon it fell into disrepair: and Malek Aziz, in 1232, rebuilt it. So great was the earnestness on the part of Aziz to encourage agricultural enterprise in this region that the fertility of the soil is said to have rivalled that of Damascus.

My attention was drawn, on the hillside, to a rock tomb. "A saint's shrine?" I asked my guide—none other than the young Sheikh Faruk.

"Nay! Allah protect us. It's no saint but the Contractor!"

"A contractor?" I asked, bewildered.

"Yes! Baba Dost, the building contractor, who is said to have taken on the work of erecting a beautiful palace for Malik Aziz: only he could not do it. See, there is the rock throne of Baba Dost, near his grave!" He pointed to it.

"And why those red flags which float in the breeze near the tomb?" I asked.

"Because, if you repeat a story long enough women consider it the truth! Our women are like that: and they have now installed the Contractor's tomb as a shrine, as they thought that he was something of a martyr at the hands of the monarch!" was the Sheikh's explanation.

"We call it a story; but it may be true," continued the Sheikh; till his wife, from behind the curtain, shouted back:

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“Abdullah, tell the traveller the story of the martyr! Tell him! Or——” She threatened to relate it herself, for only that morning she had placed her offerings at the shrine of Baba Dost and wished to be vouchsafed a son. She had three daughters, and in the desert daughters are a problem.

The Sheikh only laughed. “Ah! It is only desert-lore, because most people did not like Malik Aziz.” Instantly his wife took up the challenge. “Yes, Sister Fatma! I encouraged you to tell me about the mystery!” But the Sheikh started to tell me about it.

“Baba Dost, the Royal Contractor,” he began, “was petrified with fright, my mother so related to me, because he had been summoned to the Imperial Palace at Damascus to have audience of the Emperor Aziz whose servant he was.

“Two years ago he had obeyed a similar summons, and the Emperor, waving a Royal arm, had commanded Baba Dost to build him a palace better than the one of red sandstone at Damascus. Baba Dost, nothing loath, for he was a great builder, had accepted the Royal order and had drawn heavily on the Royal Treasury ever since. But, he had been remiss, and had dallied in his work and the palace was not built. The Emperor went but seldom

abroad for he loved playing chess more than going out. Meantime Baba Dost had dug even more deeply into the Royal coffers, and the Emperor had accepted his assurances that all was proceeding to plan, and that a palace, better than the one at his capital, was nearing completion. The Contractor had undertaken to finish the work in two years, and now the two years were up.

“He had been summoned to give an account of his stewardship, but as he gazed round at the palace he sweated. He had contracted to build better than that which he beheld!

“He stood towards the middle of the inner court, beside a small channel about six inches wide. Beyond the Emperor sat in justice, and beyond the channel none must go unbidden, not even excepting ambassadors.

“When, in obedience to the Royal command, he had presented himself in the audience chamber, the officer standing on the farther side of the channel called out his name to the Grand Vizir, the Grand Vizir, standing near the Emperor, informed Aziz of his presence. Aziz did not appear to hear, but that was usual. After an interval the Emperor raised his eyes, and glancing in the direction of Baba Dost, intimated to the Vizir that the contractor might approach.

“Baba Dost advanced falteringly beneath the

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great awnings of red velvet, heavily embroidered with gold, so heavy that the golden poles supporting them were as thick as a man's thigh.

"Malik Aziz was reclining upon his throne. Six slaves with fans of peacocks' tails were fanning their august master. Each paleky assiduously chewed dried roots for the double purpose of reddening his lips and sweetening his breath in order that it might not offend the Royal Master.

"Baba Dost glanced round the audience chamber, and shuddered.

"A voice came to him, whispering, yet insistent.

"'Better than this,' it said. 'Better than this!'

"He almost stumbled as the full realization of his folly came to him.

"He was allowed to approach to within twenty feet of the throne, but Aziz ignored his presence. Baba Dost had plenty of opportunity to take in the details of all that he should have enhanced.

"The throne was about six feet long, and four wide. It had four feet, each massive and about twenty-five inches high. To the four feet were attached bars which supported the long seat of the throne, and to the whole, twelve columns which supported the canopy.

"The feet, the bars and the columns were

covered with gold inlaid, and enriched with innumerable diamonds and rubies.

"Particularly, in the middle of each bar was a gigantic ruby with four emeralds round it forming a square cross. Radiating each side from this central motif, and to the extreme edges of the bars, were similar crosses, yet each alternating in design. Four emeralds would surround a central ruby, then four rubies a central emerald, the intervals between each design being entirely covered with great diamonds.

"The principal motif of the columns supporting the canopy was a set design in pearls, all inlaid in gold.

"Of the three cushions or pillows which were upon the Emperor's throne, that which was placed behind Aziz back was large, round like a bolster. The two others placed at his sides were flat.

"A sword, a mace, a round shield, a bow and quiver with arrows hung suspended from the throne, and all these weapons, as were the cushions, and the four steps leading to the throne, were covered with precious stones.

"The Emperor looked up from his contemplation and bade Baba Dost approach closer.

"Baba Dost went stumblingly forward, and fell down upon both knees, forehead in the dust.

"The Emperor spoke.

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“ ‘O Baba Dost, the two years are complete?’

“Baba Dost extended both arms at full length in abject supplication.

“ ‘And, my new palace?’

“Baba Dost, contractor, emitted a strangled moan.

“ ‘It was your boast that it would be better than this. Pray you well that it be so!’

“Baba Dost grovelled yet nearer the dust.

“ ‘We will inspect your handiwork!’

“Aziz rose, and accompanied by his eunuchs, entered the harem by a small door to the rear of his throne.

“The Emperor presently emerged, attired for a journey, and he intimated that he would ride upon his favourite elephant. He strode out of the palace, bidding the disconsolate Baba Dost to accompany him.

“Eight elephants awaited the Emperor. Seven went ahead, each bearing two men, one to guide the animal, and the other to hold aloft a bejewelled standard attached to a handpike.

“Immediately behind the Emperor proceeded the Princes and the officers of the household, all on gaily-comparisined horses.

“Also, there was a bodyguard of from five to six hundred horsemen, each armed with a form of handpike to which fireworks were attached.

These latter, in the form of rockets, could propel the pikes a distance of some six hundred yards when ignited.

"Baba Dost was mounted upon a mettlesome horse which he had some difficulty in controlling, but under the repeated chidings of the officers of the household he gradually forced his mount well forward in the procession until he occupied a place immediately behind the Princes. Here he was under the observation of Aziz, who looked at him from time to time with cold, calculating eyes.

"The procession wended its way in the direction of Harim and continued its unhurried pace well into the afternoon.

"The Princes ahead of Baba Dost were repeating the remarks of the Emperor. Aziz, they said, would remain the night at his new palace if it pleased him, as it must, for he was assured that it was better and more magnificent than the one he had just left behind.

"The contractor's stomach turned to water as he heard the words.

"An hour later word was passed down that the Emperor would have converse with Baba Dost.

"Two officers caught at the bridle reins of his horse, and trotted the animal alongside the Imperial elephant. They maintained their

hold for the elephant was apt to shy at horses, and the contractor's mount was mettlesome.

"‘Methinks,’ said Aziz, ‘we should be seeing the minarets ere long.’

"Dumbly Baba Dost acquiesced, for no one contradicted the Emperor.

"‘The minarets are as I ordered?’

"Baba Dost placed both hands to his forehead in obeisance.

"‘Forty spans higher than those at Damascus?’

"The contractor doubled until his head was between his horse's ears.

"Aziz scanned the horizon.

"‘There are not over many trees. Surely we should be seeing the walls and minarets by now?’

"‘Yes, lord,’ gasped Baba. ‘Very soon now; in a few more steps; a little patience, lord—and we shall be upon the place.’

"His eyes bulged fear, and the sweat poured down his haggard cheeks, for he had come to his accounting and had reason to fear the worst.

"Aziz observed his perturbation, and compressed his lips into a cruel, straight line. Perhaps he was beginning to suspect that all was not well. With an impatient gesture he ordered the contractor to fall behind, as if tired of his company.

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"The procession proceeded on its way in an electric silence. The Emperor's mood had been communicated to all, and there were troubled looks, and glances of dire foreboding.

"None spoke to Baba Dost, and all gave him plenty of room. None would be seen in converse with him in case there was something wrong and they were suspected of complicity.

"Suddenly Aziz called a halt, and he glanced around him angrily.

"He barked at two of his officers of state, and not too gently they bundled Baba from his horse.

"Aziz ordered the golden steps to be placed against his howdah that he might alight, and he stamped to the ground, consumed with rage.

"‘This is the site,’ he snarled at Baba. ‘Where is the palace?’ He pointed disdainfully at the virgin scrub, at the unplotted ground; at the utter absence of stone and mortar.

"Inspiration came to the graceless Baba. The Emperor was a curious man. There had been occasions when sheer effrontery delighted him. Could he but nerve himself to jest, perhaps all would be well.

"‘O, great lord,’ he hazarded, bowing low. ‘Do you not see the minarets? Observe the graceful sweep of the walls. There are the marble terraces my master ordered; there are

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the marble cascades gurgling with pure spring water . . .’

“He stopped, the better to observe the effect of his audacious words. He saw the Emperor glance at him as if he were mad; then suddenly come to a decision.

“He advanced upon Baba, but did not strike him down with his sword. Instead he touched upon the shoulder, and complimented him upon the excellence of his art.

“‘Come, my fine builder,’ he exhorted. ‘Come, and we will examine the audience chamber together.’

“With a great bounding in his heart Baba took hope.

“He and the monarch stalked across the barren ground.

“‘See, O lord of Hindustan,’ Baba expatiated. ‘Here is the audience chamber built with the finest Italian marble. Here, lord, is thy throne. Is it not better than that in Damascus?’

“Aziz smilingly acquiesced.

“‘Thou art my faithful servant,’ he returned, ‘and I am well pleased.’

“‘Because of your wondrous work you shall be honoured. You shall even be my viceroy and dwell in this marvellous palace in all honour.’

"He waved a hand to his men.

" 'See,' he went on, 'I will even provide you with a bodyguard who shall see that none allows my viceroy to vacate his throne, not even himself.'

" 'Come, Baba Dost!'

"The Emperor's manner was ingratiating.

"He indicated the non-existent throne.

"Aziz smiled benignly. He turned to his waiting soldiers.

" 'See,' he simpered, 'my new viceroy upon his throne. See to it that none molest him. See also that he does not forsake his trust. Should he attempt to do so, shoot him.'

"He smiled into the face of Baba already wavering upon cramped legs, then spat viciously.

" 'Come,' he ordered. 'We must be gone, and on the morrow we will interview this man's bankers. A viceroy, and one under the protection of an Emperor, has no need of private riches.'

"A grunt interrupted his discourse.

"Baba Dost had fainted."

IN THE VALLEY OF MIRACLES

CHAPTER V

IN THE VALLEY OF MIRACLES

ONWARD AGAIN I joined a caravan on its way to Kalat Simeon—the Castles of Simeon—which is so rich in early history of Syria. Day-break found me ready to get on my camel. Everybody was bestirred into activity, for the life of the caravan is something mysterious, something unintelligible, like magic.

What with shouting camel boys, hurrying pilgrims, the complaining caravanserai-keeper, it has a world of its own. But we must be off, for that elusive glimmer of a desert dawn was already beginning to pale into a lustre of risen sun, and half of the camel-riders had emerged from the *serai* already.

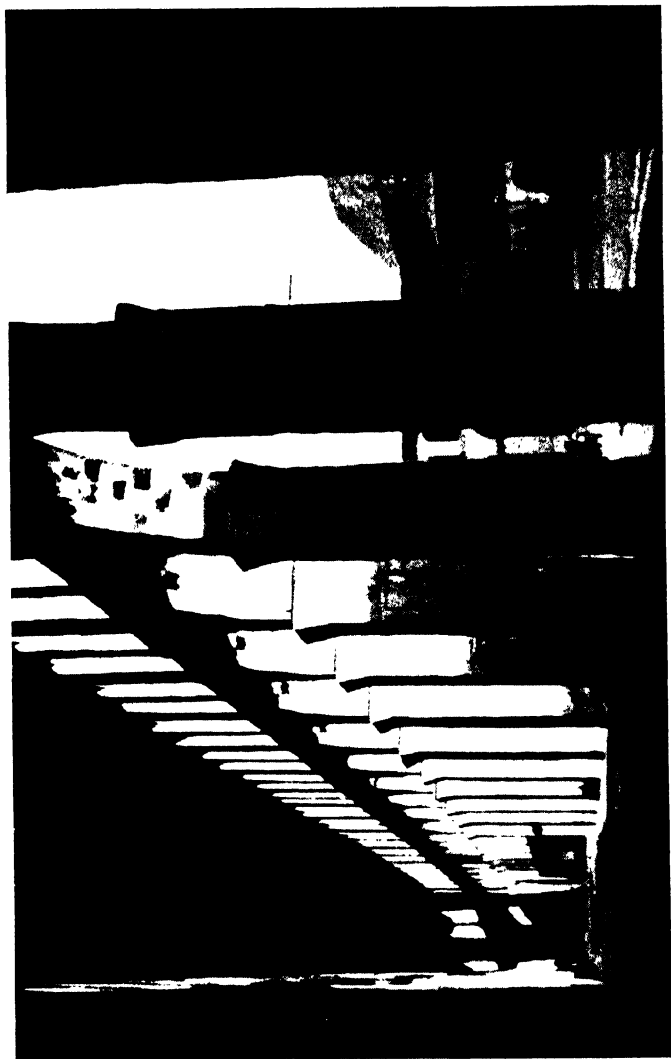
The long thread of life—our caravan—stretched into the far distance, the sun-smitten rocks blended with the hot sand; and frequently we lost our tempers, but regained them by chanting prayer, hoping soon to arrive at Kalat Simeon.

Slow our approach might have been to that

village, but my eyes were delighted with the sight of many ruins that lay scattered, surrounded as they were by Abu Barakat—or the Land of Miracles.

Next morning I was informed that the caravan would rest there for nearly a week, which gave me full opportunity of exploring the region. On a plateau, some seven hundred paces long, lie the ruins: in the heart of which reposes what remains of a monastery church. Like a Greek Cross it is spread and some columns still are intact: and if one were to examine the various parts of the ruin carefully, one is struck with the remarkable similarity of the place with the details given by Procopius.

Be that as it may, the name of Simeon is certainly fascinating—for he was a “Pillar Hermit.” In 422 he mounted a pillar, and sat there in penance for no less than seven years. Later, on another column of thirty-eight feet high he spent the rest of his days. To hear his sermons from that pillar, thousands flocked to the Kalat; and his pupils erected a church there in the fifth century. The Monastery was later converted into a fort, but the sanctity of the place attracted so many divines, both Christians and Moslems, and even those Saints who owned allegiance to no particular religion. One such was Sikand Aga—a recluse—who



INTERIOR VIEW OF THE MOSQUE OF OMAYYAD AT DAMASCUS

IN THE VALLEY OF MIRACLES

gave me some details of a cult which he was practising, and as those details are of certain secret societies of which he is the head, I consider it a distinct contribution to the Love of the Occult to record them in full as rarely exposition of a mysterious act. Here I shall give not only the "Great Sage's theory", but also what I saw done whilst in his Darbar where I resided some time—I had detached myself from the caravan now—to see the uncanny manifestations—manifestations which might frankly be called Magic and Occult. Intermixed in what follows are both my observations and what I had seen at Kalat.

Let me begin by saying that there are countless thousands in the East who devote themselves entirely to religion. They consecrate their minds; they consecrate their bodies. They are devotees in the highest sense of the word. The majority of them garner from the faithful just sufficient to keep their souls within their bodies. They cannot be termed "charlatans" even by those they disgust; they despise anything that savours of personal gain. Yet, in their religious fervour, they perform the most astonishing rites. One asks them why they do them and they reply, with quiet simplicity: "This is our way to our God. You have your way. We have ours."

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Materialism does not enter here. The hypothesis cannot be entertained. Rather is one forced to consider the phenomena in other lights. Assuredly we touch upon the supernatural and the occult.

I have seen, and many distinguished travellers have seen, fakirs, who, almost nonchalantly, have driven skewers through their cheeks. There has been no deception about it. The skewers have just been pushed through the skin and flesh, usually one on each side of the face, and the points have been allowed to protrude through the mouth. The men have walked about with the skewers in position and without seeming inconvenience. Some have even danced. Certainly, there has never been the slightest semblance of blood in any of the exhibitions which I have seen.

I can give no material explanation for this. I know that I, as a Student, would never dream of subjecting myself to such a practice. I know what pain is. I have been shot at several times.

This skewering is the least that is performed by these devotees.

I have seen, more than once, a fakir pass a sword through his neck and not, as many may suspect, through a little of the frontal skin, but from one side to the other, just where the neck is thickest. And there is positively no deception.

I have looked on aghast, with my teeth turning to water in my acute apprehension, while the sword was being inserted, for it is no quick, impulsive motion which accomplishes the operation. It is a process which is almost too much for an observer with sensitive nerves, for it is so devastatingly patent that considerable force is required to enforce the sword's passage through the flesh. Usually, the fakir has rested the hilt of the weapon upon the ground so that his entire strength may be utilized in forcing the sword through. In one such exhibition that I witnessed, the fakir succeeded in introducing the sword so far, and no farther. The point had pierced right through the flesh and had come against the skin on the far side of the neck. That skin must have been tough. It refused to admit the sword point, though the neck bulged at that spot like some monstrous bunion. It was terrifyingly real, yet I could not avert my gaze.

Quite unconcerned, the fakir called to a colleague. With his assistance, the bulging skin was forced back upon the sword point and the steel emerged. It continued to emerge under the ministrations of the fakir until quite a foot of the blade was visible.

Again, there was no blood, yet I had seen a surgical operation in its crudest sense.

Learned doctors might talk of remote control

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of hæmorrhage, yet, I think that it will be admitted that this is not strictly a human attribute. And then, what about the power over the processes of pain?

Still developing the theme of pain, or rather its absence, let us go a step further. All this, of course, I am relating as impressions gathered when with Sikandar. One can conceivably imagine that the men who operate with skewers are novices. To force a thin rod of metal through one's cheeks might, or not be, so fatiguing as slowly to insert a sword through the thickest part of one's neck. Certainly it would not be so dangerous and perhaps it would require less faith. But, if pain enters into these practices, and quite obviously it does not, how excruciating would be the agony to make play with the eye?

I have very vivid memories of receiving an ordinary cinder in my eye. The recollection makes me wince, even as I write.

I have seen men, worked up to a great pitch of excitement by the throbbing of drums, remove their eyes from their sockets, and be none the worse.

The men have not been abnormal. They had not eyes which were naturally protuberant and easily removable. And, there was no trick. Rather was it all too real, sickeningly real.

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The men who performed this seemingly impossible operation were beyond the border of all Western Science—disciples of the Saint—There were about a dozen of them and they danced maddeningly to the throb of the drums. Each had in his hand a short metal stick, on one end of which were tiny cymbals which tinkled, bell-like, as the devotee danced.

Suddenly, at a given signal, the urging of the drums ceased. The dancers became statuesque. Then, with a quick motion, they inserted the points of their metal rods under their eyelids, gave a deft twist, and their eyes had emerged from the sockets—round, amazing objects, impressing themselves upon more ordinary vision by the fact that they were thrown into dreadful relief by the eyelids which had closed mockingly behind them, like those of a blind man's.

Yet, these men could laugh and prance and, what is more, they could see. And, later, when they levered their eyes back into position, their sight was not in the least impaired. Neither did I at any time see the slightest suggestion of inflammation as a result of the ill-treatment which these delicate organs had received.

I have spoken of things which I have seen and which others have seen with me. I have carefully remained within this orbit so that no one can say that I am telling travellers' tales.

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Now certain facts about the initiation ceremony of this Black Art Secret Society might be given. The novice is initiated into a room where the only illumination is that given by burning, aromatic tapers; drums, beaten with the hand, throb to a nerve-searing rhythm; cymbals tinkle; horns crash forth long, throaty, dolorous notes; priests chant.

The novice is presented to an altar on which is a pile of wheat straw. The drums, the cymbals, the horns and the priests close in upon him. The rhythmic tempo of the drums quickens; the cymbals clash; the horns shriek; the priests yell into the initiate's ear.

A thick-stemmed dagger is insinuated into his hand.

"Strike, strike, strike," thunder the priests.

The initiate, raised to a frenzy, plunges his dagger into the wheat straw again and again. It seems harmless enough, but beneath the straw is a rabbit. The initiate "murders" the animal with hidden, secret stabs and those around him go berserk. They drink greedily at the blood and even distribute the tiny limbs for rites more revolting.

Through this ceremony all are within the fold. They have entered into a covenant of complicity, one of crime and necessarily, one of enforced silence.

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Even the sceptic will see why there is so little of that data which he demands.

For many of their rites the devotees of the Black Art demand incredible requisites. Certainly in that unfrequented part of the world, they profess to be able to turn themselves into wild animals and to become invisible at will, but before they can achieve the power, it is necessary for them to take part in protracted and evil ceremonies.

Before they can indulge in this dreadful metamorphism, those who have come within the shadow of the Black Art must partake of a ghastly banquet.

The initiates, to the accompaniment of an extraordinary ceremonial which I am quite unable to describe, consume the bones of a newly slain goat and drink camel's milk.

The priests of the Black Art are hated and feared throughout the East. There, at least, there is little scepticism. Perhaps it is because the people are brought into personal contact with the powers of these fiends and, therefore, have little choice in the matter.

I have no hesitation in saying that these servants of Satan can scatter death broadcast. Whether their mystic and evil rites have given to them a special dispensation or whether they are merely hypnotic, I cannot say. All I know

is that the influences which they exert are supernatural.

The usual method of imparting death is through the medium of a doll—invariably crudely fashioned in cow-dung in a manner resembling the intended victim.

These dolls are taken at dead of night on the top of a hill. There, a triangle is marked out with ashes from the funeral pyres of a goat—goats enter into many ceremonies—and in this is placed the doll.

During the incantations which proceed, a variety of objects are introduced to the doll—a portion of a bone of a goat, the juice from bitter limes and nearly always, thorns. If these are not available, the priests of the Black Art fall back upon needles.

The thorns (or the needles) are most important. The doll is pricked viciously with these, while the most high-sounding curses are invoked for the human victim. It is this vicious thrusting of the thorns at the requisite moment which conveys the curses through the medium of the doll to the body of he who will presently depart.

Invariably, the victim is secretly apprised of the fate which is in store for him. Also, he is certain to discover in his path a fateful magic doll, crudely dressed in a shroud.



A TYPICAL JERUSALEM STREET

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All this, of course, may be mere auto-suggestion, but there is no question of it failing. He who is so marked down will assuredly sicken and quietly die.

One such case which was remarkable, not because the victim died—that was regarded as more or less inevitable—but because of the manner in which it was accomplished.

Through the secret source, the victim was informed that he would die. He would sicken, so he was told, as his dog sickened and when the animal died, so would he.

The dog, previously a great, healthy brute and the terror of the village, most certainly did sicken, and so did the man.

The animal's passing was painful and protracted. It was consumed with an enormous appetite and an unquenchable thirst. It became thinner and thinner. Eventually, it could not support itself on its legs and it passed on. At the moment that the dog died in the compound there was a wailing from within the house. The women of the household were conscious of the death of the man.

On one occasion I was told that the Leader was going to rise—— At least a devotee told me that the Pir said: "I am rising. I am rising," and, before the eyes of those present, he certainly does rise. One cannot but accept the word of

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these men who are so patently earnest. They ask nothing of one. They want nothing. There is no reason why they should lie.

I am certain, however, that were I to attend one of these seances, I should not see the holy one rise.

Disciples have told me that they have waved their arms over the spot from which their holy leader had risen.

I have believed them. I still believe them.

Do I believe in levitation?

Yes, for those who believe.

In other words, I believe that faith can make one see the famous rope trick. I am equally certain that a mind pre-prejudiced would never see it.

I do not pretend to know which is the greater—a very human.

Having had enough of the occult atmosphere, I longed to get into another caravan taking its desert route to Beirut. At last a chance came and I fell in line with a caravan of pilgrims going to Mecca, but I was to accompany them only up to Beirut. After waiting fully for three weeks, I made ready to start on the morrow.

The sand dunes of the desert extended as far as eyes could see, like giant waves over the face of a mighty ocean, as I saw them in the early dawn from where our camel-caravan had rested

at night. Anon! The call to prayer of the morning was chanted; and soon after we were mounting our ships of the desert for another day's journey under the grilling sun.

Many times thirst, not hunger, drove us mad, as our line of men and camels dipping in and out of the sand dunes at last arrived at our halting place.

We were now unloading our camels, for darkness was falling like a palpable curtain, and men sat round tiny camp-fires, roasting dry camel flesh which we swallowed down with hot coffee: and resting our weary limbs when we reclined against our camel saddles, looking at the clustering stars hanging like pendant fire-jewels up above us; the younger of the Afghan pilgrims related the story of Gul Samander, who saved his sister's honour, and how he slayed and played with naked blades of tulwars.

Great stars still flashed in the desert sky, a sky deep and soft like purple velvet when the Afghan finished his story—a story worthy of the glens of Kabul: and although another day's march lay before us, yet it was all worth it, when one had such wonderful stories related at night, and, thinking that, I found myself gripped by sleep as suddenly as a magic spell.

The first thing I beheld on waking was two slender minarets of a distant mosque of the

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village. That in itself was a change, because so far our camel-caravan had rested at night only amongst the desert sands.

Soon we were in the mosque for the morning prayer before starting. As the packed masses in front of me rose and fell in the gestures of divine homage, now upstanding, now bowing, now kneeling, the impression it gave was as of trees bending in a gale in a dark forest.

The clear voice of the priest, sounding at intervals, and the whispered responses of the worshippers seemed like the wind flowing and returning through the wooded aisles of a palm grove.

Back again to the *serai*, we hurried to make preparations to depart for the day's journey. The clamour of vociferation rises like the drone of myriads of bees: then a voice, louder than the rest—the voice of the caravan leader. We are off on lumbering camels, the tiny bells on their hairy necks jingle merrily, and before us the desert of Allah.

The whole day again, like its previous one, we crawled over the face of those sands, dragging on under the merciless sun, constant prayers arising from our straggling ranks.

And, at night, we were at our next resting-place near a palm grove, where, after a prayer and some food, we gathered round the camp

fire to listen to the story of the Emperor of Hindustan from the lips of one of our fellow pilgrims.

At the conclusion of the story, Ahmed, who was always cynical about love, looking up to his fellow pilgrims said that he did not believe in the love of women, "for it is like pleasure, or like flowers, when attained or gathered it dies!"

But we all disagreed with him by saying that love is like a rare flower that takes root in the heart and blossoms in the soul.

As the soft wind now began to fan us, and the new moon had risen, looking like the silvery edge of a scimitar in the sky, we huddled beside our packs for the night's rest before an early start on the morrow.

The bestirring of our camel-caravan was like the moving of a multi-coloured pageant be-decked in all the colours of the East. We were up almost before dawn, because this day's march was to be a difficult one.

As a long line of our camels emerged from the palm groves, and the sun blazed over the crags, I knew that a hot day was before us. In the full realization of Kismet, a composure came upon us, as if some passing angel's hand had touched our brows in benediction.

The camels bubbled, our litters tied on their hairy backs rocked to and fro, and the heat of

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the sun touching the shimmering sands rose as a distant haze, painting the bare rocks now grey, now violet, and calmness seemed to rise around us; nothing but stretching sands to the limit of one's vision, and a sense of loneliness that beggars description enveloped us as we wended through our pilgrim route to our next resting-place.

The night came, and with it the rest. It certainly was a wondrous night—a night of enormous silence, of great steady stars, of gold-dusted air, as we sat after a meal around our camp fire.

The night was breathing on us like a soft caress, and as the story-teller spread his mat beside me to sleep and hoping to have a wife some day, he agreed with me that romance was almost as great a thing as pilgrimage—that we must have, for the saying of the Sage of the Yellow River has it: "Love is the gate through which every man enters the rose garden of life."

To-day is the day of great rejoicing, for it is the last of our pilgrimage journey on camels through the desert. We are nearing Beyreut. Everybody is excited, and practically everyone is in his litter perched on the back of a camel; the camel boys have been ready more than an hour before dawn.

But then there occurred the usual delay. The



UNCOVERING THE MOSAIC PAVEMENT IN THE CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY AT BETHLEHEM, lying some three feet below the present level of the building, which is believed to be the original floor of Constantine's Basilica

ERECTED IN A.D. 330

IN THE VALLEY OF MIRACLES

leader must be interviewed by a hundred anxious folk as he rides from end to end of the column. Others are praying incessantly, hoping that this will add merit to their pilgrimage.

After much shouting and yelling we start, and then again there is a roar from the front of the train. A pack-camel has run amok, has bitten the animal in front of it and kicked that in its rear. Uproar ensued. The owner of the beast is deluged with pious curses and has much ado to drag it by halter off the column.

A rifle shot rolls over the plain in a series of reverberating echoes. It is the signal for departure.

The day may have been hotter than on other days, but the staying power of some of these aged patriarchs was enormous. They appeared to be made of hammered steel, as they rode on their camels or walked beside them along the route of the burning sand, for the afternoon sun was declining; and we were nearing our goal: Beirut.

Beyreut!

In one of the most gorgeous settings to be found in this world. Amidst tier upon tier of the fascinating hills of Lebanon.

Beyreut! Civilization has it in its grip. Tramways, motor-cars, noise—and the smell of oil.

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The inhabitants speak French rather than Arabic and they flock to the casinos and the cheap and tawdry copies of the Western cafe.

Yet modern Beyreut is still fighting an age-long battle. Where the road emerges on the way to Damascus, there are avenues of stately pines, planted some three hundred years ago by Fakhruddin, the mighty king of the Druse. They were placed there to keep the sands of the desert at bay. On this edge of the city there are many sandy acres where the desert has encroached. The battle still proceeds.

Beyreut makes its appeal to the tourist. Its shops are filled with mementoes from the Mount of Olives (made in Greece) and brassware and copperware (made in Birmingham).

In the Beyreut hotels they will charge you a pound a day. In one's baggage there should be a tin of insecticide and a tin-opener.

My only day of real excitement at Beirut was my witnessing a duel in its bazaars. A quarrel, or rather a feud, had occurred between two men of some standing in the neighbourhood, and we were informed that a meeting had been arranged between them, which was to take place in the bazaar, of all places. Both, it appeared, were notable swordsmen, and as we believed, the duel would provide a picturesque incident.

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On the appointed day, or rather afternoon, we were conducted to the part of the bazaar reserved for combats of the kind, as was the local custom. A square of considerable size had been left vacant and was surrounded by a large and voluble crowd. So far there was no sign that the encounter was about to commence, the sole source of excitement being the rather leisurely activities of a couple of boys who were doing a good business in sherbet with the thirsty crowd.

At last the combatants arrived. One was a tall, hawk-faced fellow with immense up-curling moustaches, such a figure as one would not care to have encountered in a deserted mountain pass. To my eye he seemed to have brigand written all over him. His opponent appeared younger, slimmer, but every whit as active and muscular. Indeed they seemed very evenly matched.

Drawing their tulwars they advanced, and at a signal from the umpire, blade rasped upon blade. Then a series of evolutions, so rapid as almost at times to cheat the eye, followed. The tulwars locked, seemed to coil around each other, separated, flashed, whirled. Each man was obviously a master of his weapon, trained from boyhood to wield it so that it was at once sword and shield. At one moment a tulwar would be merely a silver gleam in air, the

motions of which the sight could not follow. The next it would be rigid as death, guarding the neck of its owner against a lightning sweep of steel.

For at least ten minutes neither combatant appeared to have any advantage over the other and I began to regard the affray more as an exhibition of skill than a serious duel. But just as I had come to this conclusion, something happened which caused me to change my opinion. A thin stream of blood was trickling down the arm of the older man. I had not seen the wound given, indeed it was impossible to follow the motions of the swiftly circling blades. The wound could not have been a very serious one, for the flow of blood was meagre, but it certainly arrested the attention of the crowd, who broke into a gabble of sound and pointed to the crimson line on the injured man's sleeve.

But the end came more suddenly than anyone had bargained for. Whether the wounded man felt his strength failing or whether he was enraged by the comments of the spectators I cannot say. In any case he appeared to grow suddenly desperate. Whirling his tulwar high above his head, he rushed upon his enemy with a raucous shout and delivered a terrible blow at him. Like a panther the other leapt aside, so that the blow descended upon empty air. But



THE DOME OF THE ROCK, JERUSALEM

IN THE VALLEY OF MIRACLES

as it descended, he thrust the blade of his tulwar beneath the other's arm, so that the wrist came down upon the razor-like edge.

As the hapless swordsman was borne off, an aged and bearded person behind me spoke his mind. "Nations and peoples who strike with the sword downward, who raise the arm in fight, are doomed to perish," he intoned. "Many times have I so said to our brother Ahmed. But my counsel was not taken and now he has no sword-hand left to strike with. It is Kismet."

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CHAPTER VI

THE LAND OF PEACE

THERE IS one more important institution at Beyreut. It is the American College, or to give its official name, the Syrian Protestant College. Since its foundation in 1866 as an undenominational and independent institution it has done more good than half a dozen missionary societies. It has done good by teaching arts and crafts and above all medicine, and not thrusting religion down the throats of its scholars; thus has not made bad Christians out of good Moslems.

The extraordinary thing about Beirut is that it is less Arabia and more "bad France", because even although the Moslem population is about fifty per cent there, Arabic is spoken less and less. You would perhaps consider that more French, therefore, was spoken; and you would be wrong as I was, for by far the largest number of people spoke Italian. Does it portend anything of the swinging of politics in the Near East?

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Amongst the Moslems there you would hear a good deal about the mighty Fakhruddin—a Druse Prince, who with the Venetian alliance was able to create an independence in 1595; but his favouritism of the Christians was his undoing. They still show a legendary spot along the quay which is said to have suffered considerably when in 1840 the British Fleet had bombarded Beirut.

It was on my way to Baalbak—the City of Sun-god—I was received by Sheikh Abdullah in his encampment; who persuaded me “to rest” with him a while before proceeding on a sort of Arab horse to Baalbak. To rest meant going on raids with him. But fortunately the raids did not come off. He had but recently acquired his third wife, and as she was both young and beautiful, and Abdullah was also young and a merchant prince of the desert, I readily fell in with the idea of travelling with his camel train; our third encampment was not far from Jannin, and finding that there was a caravanserai in the village we resolved to stay the night there rather than encamp outside.

The sun now touched the minaret tops, and men were bending low to evening prayer when our caravan wended its way up and down, and up again to the mighty gates beyond which lay our destination for the night. The camels’

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hairy necks were agitating the tiny jingling bells as that camel train passed the shrine, when we were entering the village.

“Peace and prosperity,” shouted the Bedouin from under his thatched roof to Abdullah, the Sheikh of the desert, who was my companion and host: “Carry ye the silk and amber of Egypt to the markets of the city of minarets and domes?”

The leader of the caravan, proud and young and haughty, returned the salutations. Then he counted his rosary beads, as I reminded him whether he should speak to a stranger—a stranger without the city gates? For I thought of the sayings of the Holy Guide: “Speak not, O wayfarer,” the Saint had told us, “to any stranger beyond the city gates, unless thou wish’st thy most cherished thing to perish.”

Sheikh Abdullah turned in his saddle to see whether all was well with his lumbering camels. And Abdullah did this, as fear stole into his heart—a fear not for the rich merchandise that he carried or the spices of Ind that he could buy and take back to Arabia’s distant shores, but he feared for the steed he mounted, the horse that he had reared and fed on milk—and milk is scarce, and dearer perhaps than the blood of men in the desert and hilly land.

Abdullah had waited and watched and

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tended this one great desire of his heart, this matchless white steed of Arabia, with which he refused to part for ten thousand domes of Samarkand.

In that gloaming that divides like a thin strand of golden ribbon night from day, tinkled and tinkled the bells on the necks of his hundred camels, as our caravan jostled and jangled its way between the yawning gates of the Caliph's city—the Caliph that was. Like a black streak the caravan so richly loaded moved on over the pale face of the burning sands.

Boys, men, old and young had welcomed Sheikh Abdullah to the caravanserai. The inn-keeper had roasted a whole desert gazelle in his honour. For you should know that Abdullah was both rich and popular, and he parted with his gold as readily as sinners part with their virtues.

And now, the *imam* had called us to prayer, and all our muleteers and camel boys were busy lighting their fires, like so many glow-worms in the vast caravanserai; the bearded Sheikh reclining against the camel saddle told his beads in silence. There was much for which the Sheikh of the desert had to thank Allah, I thought. A thousand pieces of gold and more he would receive for his merchandise; and then I saw my host's eyes alight upon that tethered

form of beauty, on his horseflesh beyond compare, Secunder, a thing which he would not barter for the twin rivers of Babylonia that watered his land and gave dates to the world. Men styled the horse the heart's desire. These matters must have been in Abdullah's mind, when I saw him doze off, but hardly had he been asleep ten minutes when: "Ya Abdullah!"—the shout rang out in the *serai*.

As is the custom with the desert warriors, Abdullah's hand sought his scimitar, for rudely awakened men think not between friends and foes. And then out of the darkness loomed the caller, no other than Abdullah's best friend and compatriot, another of the mighty warrior clans, Sheikh Ahmed.

"Peace and prosperity be upon thee, O Abdullah!" said Ahmed. "My hair has grown grey in thinking of thee. Thou hast tarried long in thy groves, but methinks that thy train grows larger, Allah be praised! And tell me, brother Abdullah, of thy welfare, of the health of thy children. Ah! and tell me, too, Abdullah, of the desire of my heart, of that son of the Milky Way—that horse!"

Abdullah acknowledged the salutation of his old friend, Sheikh Ahmed: "Come and sit ye down, brother. But what is it weighs in thy hand?"

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“ ’Tis but a bag of gold pieces, the price of something I will buy,” I heard Ahmed say.

As sons of two powerful neighbouring chiefs, they had learned the subtle art of war together. Both had loved and lost together, for both of their respective wives died young and the spell that a woman casts upon the warrior clans is a spell that knows no severance, not even that of death.

In blood feuds and forays, Ahmed and Abdullah had ridden to victory: if Abdullah had grown rich by trading, Ahmed was not less wealthy, for, if his palm groves had been cut down to the roots, in his lands gushed “the fat of the earth” which they call petrol, and which some European companies shared with him to their mutual benefit.

Abdullah, therefore, was truly happy to greet his old friend Ahmed—but he loved one thing more than Ahmed; he loved his noble Arab horse.

“For once, my brother Ahmed, thou and I find our minds not in agreement,” said my Arab host to Ahmed. “The desire of thy heart, this Prince of the desert which I have reared, seems to be thy craving also. See thee it not tethered, whipping the gloom with its moonlit tail, and I, O Ahmed! shall not part with it till the crack of doom!”

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Ahmed gulped his coffee and laughed a hearty laugh as he rose to grasp his friend's hands in bidding him good-bye.

"My heart is set upon thy horse, O Abdullah," he said, "and maybe the crack of doom will be to-night, for fight though I may not with thee, I may buy or steal thy charger. A thousand gold pieces shall I give you as a price for the son of the Milky Way."

And although at this Abdullah became wrath, the ebony of the dark night hid the colour that mounted upon his cheeks, and he only whispered in suppressed anger: "Speak not thus-wise, O Ahmed! Speak no more of it! Speak no more of the son of the Milky Way, and begone! Begone, before my scimitar bares its face."

But there was one thing about Ahmed: when he set his mind upon a thing, he usually got it. No man could say him nay.

Abdullah, anxious in mind, rose from his seat and secured his horse firmly to the camel's saddle before reclining to the recitation of his last prayer of the evening.

"Ahmed, Walehey (I swear by the Name of Allah) is a great one, a mighty swordsman and a mightier thief, but by the beard of the Holy Priest, I am a mightier thief-catcher, but . . ." He gasped when I handed him a bag of gold pieces. It had been where Ahmed sat: a bag of

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one thousand gold pieces, and Abdullah became over-anxious. This meant, he thought, the severance of generations of friendship between their two houses, for if that bag of a thousand pieces of gold meant the price of the horse of which Ahmed had spoken, "then Walehey," said the Sheikh to me, "I, Abdullah, the son of Abdullah, shall slay Ahmed this night."

Thus he had perhaps spoken too early, for a form descended upon my Merchant Sheikh, his scimitar struck only the wooden part of the camel's saddle, we were both gagged and bound. Anon we heard "the son of the Milky Way" with some agitation cantering out, as the huddled, gagged and bound forms of Sheikh Abdullah and myself, reclining against the bag of gold, endeavoured to peer through the darkness of the *serai* gate, and witnessed his horse being swallowed by the gloom of the desert night.

It is the custom amongst the gallant men of Arabia to accept such defects of pleasantries with an inborn sense of humour, and Abdullah next morning said but little, as he led his train out of the *serai*. Leaving the bag of a thousand golden pieces with the *serai*-keeper, to him he said:

"If you see Ahmed, give him this gold. Gold I do not seek." And the rest of the story I heard

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from the Sheikh himself on my next meeting with him.

Weeks and months passed it seemed, and the anger for his horse in Abdullah's heart remained. Although he sold much and bought more from the bazaars, thus growing richer and richer, his heart was not at peace. Above all, he wanted the horse, that horse and no other. Yet, search he high and low amongst the groves or the crowded bazaars, or send he word to Ahmed in his desert fastness, an oblivion seemed to have swallowed all trace of the son of the Milky Way.

When many moons had passed, during which men may forget much, Abdullah still found his wound deepening, and he resolved to go to Damascus or even to the lair of Ahmed for the son of the Milky Way. He would regain the animal at all costs. Will you believe it, but it just so chanced to be that the day on which he set foot in the city of domes and minarets he heard from the *serai*-keeper that Ahmed had refused to take back the thousand gold pieces, and that very day he was expected to come to the city for the Friday prayer.

That clue was enough for Abdullah and, donning a beggar's garb, he shuffled his way out of the city gates. It was still some hours before the midday prayer, and from yonder

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towering hills, through those cedar groves, down the path beside the Shrine of the Holy Priest, lay the route that Abdullah must take, and there under the shade of a cluster of date-palm trees did Abdullah sit, waiting and watching.

The peasants, leading their beasts of burden, were now trekking towards the gateway. They came in twos and threes, singly, in hordes, on prancing desert mares, limping donkeys, or merely following their womenfolk on foot, all treading their several ways, chanting, singing, or telling their prayers on their rosary beads on that holy day of the week. From each and from all did Abdullah seek alms.

"Give, in the Name of Allah. Give on the Holy Day," he shouted as they passed. And many a silver and copper coin tinkled in the beggar's bowl. But Abdullah waited patiently, his eyes glued to the bend of yonder hill.

Anon he saw as if a streak of whiteness leapt the side of the hill. With it, too, did his heart leap, for it was no other than Ahmed who galloped, mounted on the desire of his heart.

"Give, in the Name of Allah," shouted Abdullah, as Ahmed came near.

The rider pulled in his horse.

"Wilt not give a poor beggar now a lift upon thy beauteous horse to the mosque, where



A CAFÉ IN TIBERIAS

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beggars and kings may pray this day together,” said Abdullah to Ahmed in an assumed tone, “for see ye not,” and the beggar pointed to his bared feet tied with rags, “that mine sore feet can take me no further than the shade of these trees?”

Ahmed, dismounting, put the beggar in the saddle.

“Thus, indeed,” he said to Abdullah, “thou shalt ride this day, even as the king rides to the prayer, and knowest thou, O beggar, that thou sittest upon the finest horseflesh ever born in this desert, and I, I the Sheikh, will walk beside thee on my feet. For thus I might win acceptance in the eyes of the One Who neither sleeps nor eats, but lives for ever.”

In a trice Abdullah dug his heels in the sides of his horse. Like lightning it jumped. Abdullah had thrown off his beggar’s cloak, and galloped far into the desert: but soon he came back and he said to Ahmed: “Take my horse, O Ahmed, and also thy thousand pieces of gold, lest the word goes round the desert that thou lost thy mount through giving help to a beggar; for thus charity will vanish from our sandy homelands.” And so the desert code of honour was kept intact.

Thence to the city of the Sun-God, ancient Baalbak. The Sheikh had provided me with an

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escort as there was blood feud amongst the tribes.

The great Temple of Jupiter is gone, but the Temple of Bacchus a dream, though a broken dream, this Baalbak.

Standing upon its own stylobats, the enormous columns still stand around it. At the entrance, the glorious tracings of leaf and vine are still there for all to see.

And the gigantic blocks of stone in the walls of the temple! Blocks, sixty-four feet in length, ten feet thick and twenty-five in height. How were they transported over the mountains? How were they put in place?

Six enormous columns are all that remain of the glorious Temple of Jupiter—six silent symbols of a mighty past.

Sitting astride one of the columns, I espied an Arab in typical flowing garb. He rose to meet me as I advanced. He greeted me in English. He wore patent leather shoes. And, how pointed!

As I wanted to see Christmas festivities at Jerusalem, I hurried back from Baalbak southwards to Damascus, and thence travelled by motor car to a nearest point on the north of the Holy City.

Farther south—Jerusalem, and not the Jerusalem that is seen by so many flying tourists, but

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Al Quids—Jerusalem the Holy, in Muslim thought the second city to Mecca in sanctity and of which Allah himself speaks in his book.

Few Christians, whose knowledge of the Faith has been drawn entirely from the Sunday School, are aware of the close relationship between their own religion and that of the Moslems.

Yet it is in Jerusalem that the two faiths meet.

As towering and barren cliffs rose right and left of me on the north-west of Jerusalem, sensations in my mind were of an anticipation of awe, almost a blending of a discoverer's enthusiasm with a pilgrim's devotion. A high rugged pass it was through which my pony carried me, but presently the colour changed. Stunted bushes gave place to dwarfed olive trees, more trees followed, then a grove; now men and women of Arabia spread their white sheets under the shade of the trees, heaping the purple and oily fruit upon these.

A little further under these mystic trees reposed a shepherd, his flock wandered not far, their black tails moved as the lambs darted in between the twisted trunks of the olive trees. A stream trickled sedately. Now the shepherd was climbing up the terrace, his flock following.

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He held a lamb in his arms, his long abay swayed a little, a tall hooked stick in hand, he was now washing the lamb in the stream. The stillness of the scene, that peacefulness of the picture engraved itself on my mind. Had Jesus not walked in that way? Yes, the drama of ages was there for the seeing eyes; and fortunate it was that I saw it that way, for then only did I know why the men in that European Gala night had called Palestine unholy—they no eyes to see holiness, no heart to throb with the majesty that lay in that Sacred Land.

The night being Christmas Eve, Jerusalem was packed with sightseers, for pilgrims they were not, if you can judge them from their liner-trunks, large horn spectacles and big tips to the religious guides. It was just past the hour of my morning prayer, when I hurried to the Church of Holy Sepulchre trying to be the first to view the many ceremonies that take place there. Let alone the interior, I could hardly get into the courtyard of the Church. The place was packed out, hundreds had slept outside the Holy Precincts the night before to gain early admittance.

Whilst I waited for the good official of a High Church dignitary in order to get into the Church, the crowd increased. Arabs, Arme-

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nians, Copts and men of many European countries closed on the gate. Reverently they stood, muttering prayers, crossing and recrossing themselves, rubbing the holy oil upon their locks, buying trinkets, glass beads, or olive wood crosses made in Hebron as sacred relics.

When at last inside the Church, the simplicity of the place overpowered me. A dim, religious light shone through the window, on one of the balconies a choir sang and filled the space with moving music. Women bent low here and there before altars on uncovered stone floors; a priest was blessing the rosaries of some Arab youths near a slab where the body of Christ is believed to have been anointed. People were crossing themselves from right to left three times and then kissed the stone as they entered. Looking above, one saw an enormous dome supported by square pillars; the walls around were mildewed, and architecturally it may not compare favourably with the Italian churches. But does stone and mortar matter in these things?

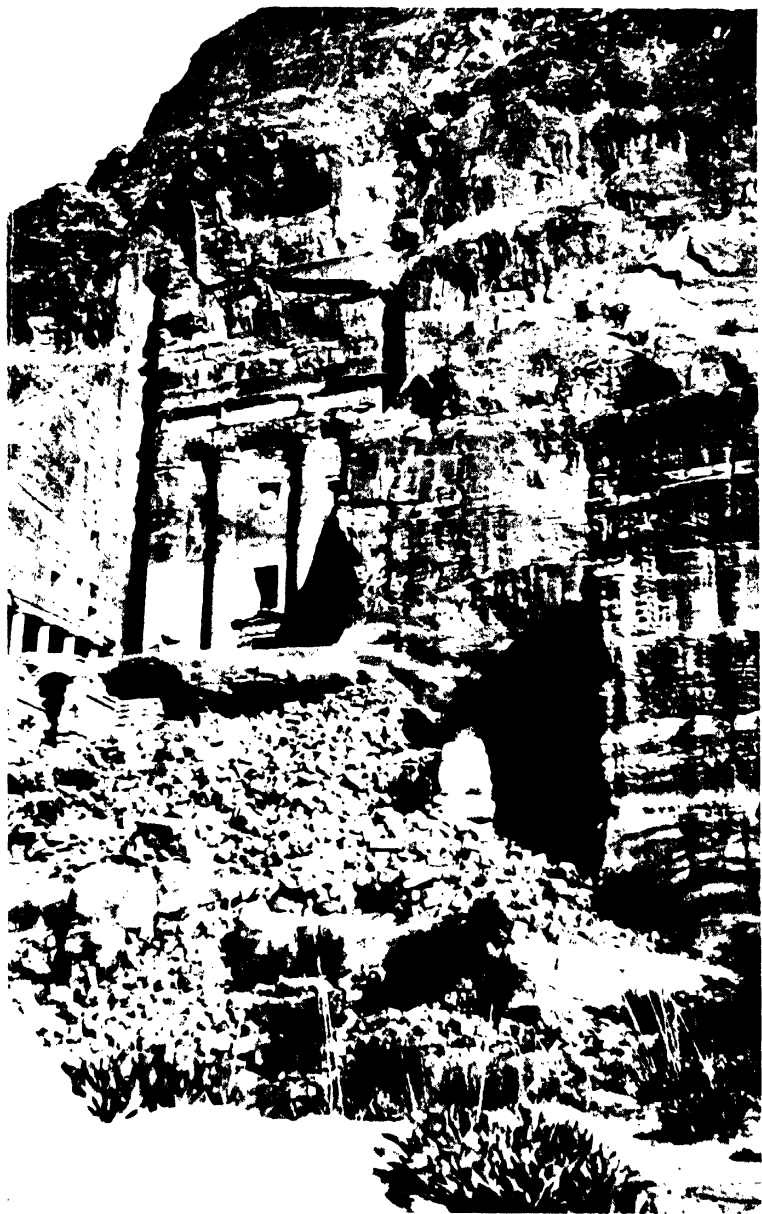
The greatest object of sanctity, that is the Sepulchre itself, stood in the centre of the Rotunda. One would call it a domed shrine of about twenty-five feet in height. Some sixteen columns surround it, but the twisted stones of

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those ornamented columns where its door was, had beauty all their own. Passing under an arched door, I was before the raised marble edifice, very much like an Eastern grave; it was not longer than a little over six feet.

A Greek monk, tall, grim and stately, stood reciting prayers; he held a peasant boy by the arm, blessing him all the while as the youth bent his knees before the mighty tomb. A rosary had fallen from the hand of an old woman, as overcome with religious fervour, she emerged from the little room; tears climbed and sunk, riding over her wrinkled face. Behind it a few Copts were singing lustily their hymns in Arabic, and the tassels of their red tarbooshes moved to and fro on their ebony faces. Men and women lit their small tapers and were disappearing into various vaults to familiarize themselves with different localities appertaining to the life of their Saviour.

Outside again, the crowd had melted, small boys still ran hither and thither selling holy glass rosaries and olive wood crosses; the worshippers were coming in and out, procession after procession. Priests in black cloaks, choir boys in white robes, the Patriarch in dazzling raiments of scarlet and gold. A choir singing, then another chanting; and over it all the great big bells clanged and chimed in spiritual tones;



ROCK BUILDINGS IN PETRA

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and then a melody of hymns rose from a thousand throats that would have shaken with emotion, even the greatest of all pagans.

Unlike any other town, Jerusalem does not seem to have ups and downs in its ordinary life by the occurrence of such ceremonies as Christmas and Easter, for the devout atmosphere is always present with the everyday conditions of the place. Maybe that it was due to this that not an inconsiderable number of worshippers followed the Franciscan fathers on their procession every Friday through, via Dolorosa. If you have even the slightest religious warmth, go and see these venerable men "take" the Way of Sorrow on which Jesus walked bearing the Cross, and appreciate that, this materialistic age notwithstanding, men can yet stand to their conviction, within not many miles of midnight revels and hilarity of vice and wine.

There are fourteen "stations" where white-bearded monks, wearing sandals, topees, and thick blanket coats, kneel and recite prayers on this Way of Agony in the grilling heat of midday sun. The procession is led by Moslem mace bearers, through bazaars, up and round the cobbled paved streets of Jerusalem. Later, see also how a Christian Arab salutes his Moslem countrymen, how they greet each other "Saba-hul Khair"; they shout to each other with a

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smile, and feel the love of good neighbourliness, for they appreciate here more than in any other part of the world that both are "the people of the Book".

A Moslem's heart goes to the Harem Sharief of Al Quids which encompasses the Holy Mosque of Aqsa, spoken of in the Koran, and the Sukhra Rock, the scene of the Prophet's mighty journey to the Celestial Throne of Allah. On entering the gigantic quadrangle, an edifice rectangular, on which a blue dome rises to about seventy feet. It is the Quliahtul Sakhra, or the Dome of the Rock. Standing on a raised platform it dominates the view; but, discarding my shoes as I went in, I beheld a thing, the like of which my eyes had never seen.

A light fell upon a gigantic grey-red rock within, on a stone with ripples and twists in undulations. It lay there like something living, all in a piece, some sixty feet in length. The hoofs of Boraq, the Prophet's charger, are shown, also I prayed in a crypt under the rock by descending eleven steps. It is surrounded by a railing almost to the height of my size, and I am a tall man. The effect of the light in the interior through the coloured glass windows was marvellous; the ceiling is painted with dull gold; the floor is of marble mosaic. The richness of decoration inside brings home to the wor-

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shipper how little sacred things need man's hand to beautify them.

There are many arches on the platform on which the dome stands, and then one descends to pray in the mosque, which is second only to Mecca in sanctity. Sycamore trees frame it like a picture as its marble arches face you, bathed in the tropical sunshine. Not dissimilar to the great mosque of Omayyad at Damascus, it is a beautiful building. For the reconstruction and repair, the present gifted Grand Mufti of Jerusalem is chiefly responsible. Here, as in other Moslem buildings, the Nazam of Hyderabad's name is shown as a donor of help which was needed for its repair and nobly has the native carver's hand effected the ravishing beauty of its inner domes and carved niches. To pray there was an experience which I shall ever remember with gratitude; for after the *imam* had recited, and rows upon rows of the faithful had bent and touched the earth together. I was thrilled to see beady-eyed Uzbeks of Bokhara, men of Java, a Punjabi Musalman and even a scribe from Kirmanshah sitting at the fountain talking to their own kind, none speaking the other's language and yet all have been one at prayer, all men of one brotherhood. One felt proud to feel that one was not alone in the world.

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Curious to relate, both the Christian and Moslem festivals often occur on Fridays. One might be in the morning, the other in the afternoon and or even concurrently, but never is there a communal or religious riot or unpleasantness on that score. This I saw on a Friday when one procession was passing up via Dolorosa; the Arabs were crowding in adjoining streets to go to celebrate an occasion at the Tomb of Moses. The Moslem Arabs trek from all corners of the northern desert to Jerusalem for this Feast of Nabi Musa as a three days' gala fair is held at the reputed tomb of the prophet Moses.

From early morning on that Friday you could see little streams of peasant Arabs trickling down the brown-grey valleys in the environs of the Holy City. Bedecked in their gayest clothes, new abays, embroidered headgear of Agal and Kafiyah, even using staffs painted in many colours, they are on their festive march to Jerusalem. Women came too; their long skirts trailing behind them. A little before the midday Friday prayer, the Harem Sharief is full of money makers; and as soon as the prayer is over, their procession starts for the tomb of Moses. On the way they danced a hopping sword dance, slashing the empty air with their shining blades, and singing the praises of Moses.

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Green and black banners are carried behind the mount of a Syed, their leader of procession. Women with their relatives also enjoyed the yearly open air bazaars of Nabi Musa, but only till dusk, after which they must cook the "sacred cakes" to be distributed amongst the poor, for "thuswise the great Nabi," says the Arab tradition, "is pleased to recommend a better season of olive fruit." Thus in song and feasting, buying and selling, three days of rejoicing were happily spent.

But before I may describe my journey to Petra, the Red Rose City of the desert, let me just add certain observations regarding the Inn at Bethlehem where the historical Church of the Nativity, marking the birth-place of the Saviour, is situated, had just then become the subject of great archæological interest.

While carrying out certain repairs to the building a mosaic flooring was found some three feet below the existing level of the church. An unexpected find like this in such a sacred shrine naturally awakens more than ordinary interest.

It was Constantine, the first Christian Emperor, who erected a Basilica at Bethlehem over a cave which was at that time believed to mark the spot of the Nativity. That was in the year 330. Some two centuries later Justinian carried out certain repairs to the structure. From that

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day to this the historic building is only supposed to have received ordinary attention in the matter of renovations and repairs, and it was generally believed that the main features of the Basilica stood as Constantine erected it.

The discovery has brought to the fore two interesting questions: To what period in its history does the present building belong, and, far more interesting still to the lay mind, what effect has it upon the claim of the grotto here to be the birthplace of the Saviour? Before attempting to answer these questions let us first note how the discovery came to be made and the reason that led Constantine to select this spot as the site of the Nativity.

The other summer Mr. William Harvey, the famous architect, was brought out to Jerusalem by the Palestine Government to advise what should be done to preserve the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the Holy City. Mr. Harvey is officially connected with the Office of Works, his business being the preservation of ancient buildings and monuments. In this type of work he is regarded as an expert, particularly in regard to large domed buildings. The walls of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre were bulging at a dangerous angle caused by the weight of the dome.

While in Jerusalem he was asked to inspect

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the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem. He recommended certain necessary repairs, particularly the need of strengthening the pillars carrying the roof. While excavating by one of the pillars in the church a section of a mosaic flooring was revealed. This was an unexpected find. The opening was enlarged when it was seen that the mosaics covered a wide area. The floor of the Church was then taken up when it was found that three feet or so below the present level of the Church lay a beautiful mosaic pavement. Did this mark the floor of the original Church and, if so, why was it covered up in this way?

The mosaics are of exceptional fine quality, the design being in the form of a floral scroll, a pattern which was in vogue in Byzantine times. There is an entire absence of animal and human figures so characteristic of mosaic work of the fifth and sixth centuries. Again, the four rows of columns that support the roof of the side aisles and the upper walls of the nave were built in connection with a floor whose level must have been approximately the same as that of the present floor. This conclusion is confirmed by the fact that the mosaic pavement ends in a broken edge running parallel to the sides of the foundation walls supporting the colonnades.

Further excavations, carried out during the

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past season, have shown that this mosaic pavement not only covered the present nave of the Church, but extended also to the apse. The present apse is triapsidal in plan, but the mosaic flooring here would indicate that originally the apse was octagonal in design. The flooring of this octagonal apse is divided into two sections, between which there is a raised circular structure, through which a small hole permitted a view of the sacred grotto below. Not only did this aperture permit a glance of the grotto, but through it a beam of light penetrated the cave.

Since nothing has been found indicating an earlier structure to this mosaic pavement, the conclusion which Mr. Harvey and other experts have come to is that the mosaics mark the floor of the original Church which Constantine erected on this site. How much more of his work survives incorporated in the structure of the present building it is impossible to say. It is evident, however, that the Basilica he erected had a central nave and four side aisles, and that the width of the Church was identical with that of the present structure. The apsidal transepts, however, which form the most striking feature of the present building, did not exist in the original plan, Constantine favouring an octagonally-shaped apse. Indeed, Constantine's

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church must have been almost totally demolished before the present Basilica could have been erected.

But the question which mostly concerns the lay mind is not so much whether the present Church dates back to Constantine's day, but whether the discovery throws any fresh light upon the authenticity of the grotto as the birth-place of the Saviour.

So far back as A.D. 100 Justin Martyr repeats a tradition current in his time that a certain cave in Bethlehem had been sanctified by the birth of Christ. Then, early in the second century the Roman Emperor Hadrian is said to have destroyed a church which stood on Christ's birthplace at Bethlehem and erected in its place a temple to Adonis. In laying some new flagstones in the courtyard of the Church some two seasons ago, a vaulted subterranean chamber was found, thought to be the remains of Hadrian's pagan temple. It all tends to indicate that the present Church stands over the cave which the Christians of the first century believed to be the spot of the Nativity.

This underground chamber, which has been accepted for so long as the birthplace of Christ, lies below the Greek or main portion of the Church, and is reached by a circular staircase. It is forty feet long, twelve feet wide and ten

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feet high. The walls are lined with marble, and the floor is paved with the same material. At the bottom of the steps is an altar beneath which, set into a marble slab, is a silver star, which is claimed to be the exact spot of the Nativity and hallowed accordingly. Opposite this altar are three steps leading down to another altar, where stood the manger in which the Virgin Mother is said to have laid her child.

Here it is interesting to note what the writers of the New Testament have to say in regard to the matter. After all, that is the best authority. We have had nearly a century of exploration work in Palestine, and with all the excavations which have been carried out by archæologists and scientists the Bible has never been found to be wrong. It is a startling fact, but nevertheless true.

It is significant that in the two Gospel narratives—St. Matthew and St. Luke—where the Birth of Christ is dwelt upon, neither of them mentions a cave, stable, barn, or anything equivalent. Matthew, speaking of the Wise Men, says: "And when they were come into the 'house' they saw the young child with Mary, his Mother." (Matt. ii. 11). There is no mention here of a stable, but a house.

True, Luke, in recording the event, refers to a manger. He tells us how the shepherds

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“found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger.” (Luke ii. 16). But what Luke meant is not a manger of a recognized stable, but the manger found in an ordinary home.

The interior of the peasants' dwellings in Palestine are divided into two sections, one being the living quarters of the family, the other being reserved as a shelter for cattle. The family occupy an upper platform, known as the *mustabeh*, while the cattle are accommodated below, this stable portion of the dwelling being known as the *rowyeh*.

When visitors come, and there is no room for them on the *mustabeh*, they sleep and live here. The cattle are turned out, mats and rugs are laid on the floor, and the *rowyeh* made as comfortable as possible. No cattle occupy the *rowyeh* while it is used as living quarters. I have frequently passed such dwellings at night and noticed animals tied to rings in the wall outside, an indication that the *rowyehs* were being used by relatives or friends of the owner.

Then in nearly all *rowyehs* a small raised place may be detected, a crude manger, on which the owner often sleeps at night to enable him to keep better watch over the newly-born lambs, lest in the crowded quarters some get crushed or trodden down by the older ones. Here he often sleeps by preference on a cold

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night, for he says the breath of the animals keeps him warm. Should a baby be born in a *rowyeh* this manger would naturally be found a handy and a safe place in which to lay it.

We are all acquainted with pictures and Christmas cards depicting the Infant Jesus surrounded by cattle. If you show such a picture to the peasants of Palestine they will look at you with surprise and declare that no child is ever born in the presence of cattle or allowed to remain among them.

Whether the caverns below the Church at Bethlehem were once above ground and formed the *rowyehs* or basements of private houses one cannot say. It is the opinion of the writer that they rather represent the stable portion of the inn where Joseph and Mary sought shelter. They are close to the market-place at the junction of the main roads into the town, the very place one would expect to find a village inn or khan. Furthermore, the stable portion of these Eastern inns is often nothing more than a crude shelter, partially excavated out of the rocky ground and often partly underground.

If we accept the Church of the Nativity as marking the site of the inn where Joseph and Mary sought shelter, and the peasants' belief that Christ was born in the *rowyeh* of a private house, it is only in keeping with the gospel



A VIEW OF NAZARETH

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narrative. The Church at Bethlehem is still of great historic interest, for it was here that Joseph and Mary applied and failed to find the accommodation they so sorely needed.

THE LOST CITY OF THE DESERT

CHAPTER VII

THE LOST CITY OF THE DESERT

SO MUCH misconception exists regarding the Palestinian Arab of the desert that I endeavoured to understand his mind in the environs where he has his being. This is why I went to see Sheikh Husain on my way to Transjordan.

Life has become very complicated for Sayid Hussein. He lives without the City of Abraham—Hebron to the Westerns; El Khalil to the Arabs—midway between Jerusalem and Beer-sheba. Here is the tomb of Abraham which the years have sanctified as a Moslem shrine, and here, too, is a great mosque into which the Infidel was forbidden to enter before that mysterious instrument, the Mandate, was born of the League of Nations.

Here, too, it was Sayid's wont lazily to seek repose under the trees while he kept an eye on the women-folk at work, for even in the days of the Turks, Sayid Hussein was passing rich. In addition to his few acres of land he had thirty

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camels and seventy donkeys, all of which could be harnessed to the primitive wooden plough.

Sometimes the camels were abreast; more often, because the camels were required to convey Sayid and his family to Jerusalem, a lone camel found itself in incongruous liaison with an ass. His ideas and his outlook rested upon the long vista which took one back to the easy, sleepy times of Abraham, and he knew nothing, and cared less for the modern harnessing of physical energy, and the dynamic forces of uplift and progress.

Proud as the Aztec Indians of Mexico, and with a background not dissimilar, he is not out of his depth, and he confessed as much to me as I had of his hospitality. I sat sipping sheep's milk—a rich, and not unpleasant beverage, while in a room beyond the mud-brick apartment which was Sayid's humble audience chamber, I could hear a gentle "swish-swish" as the women of the household monotonously, to the wailing rhythm of ancient Arab songs, swung a large sheepskin from a cross-bar in the making of butter.

Beneath the flowing Arab robes, and the black, hawk-like eyes which surmounted it, Sayid was a child. Without touching too much on politics, we discussed this new Palestine which was the promised land. We treated the

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subject generally, and mainly from the economic angle, for Sayid knows very little about figures, and all the business transactions of his life have been carried out by memory.

His eyes were puzzled as he spoke of the never-ceasing influx of the white races, and he experienced difficulty in putting his thoughts into words. I could have told him what was worrying him, but I did not assail his mind with figures which would mean little or nothing. I could, for instance, have told him that the census taken in 1922 showed a total population of 757,182, comprising 590,890 Moslems, 83,794 Jews, 73,024 Christians and 9,474 of other faiths. I could have told him also that the Jewish population had doubled itself by 1927, and was now racing towards that figure when its numbers would soon be commensurate with those of the Arabs.

He could see the Jews everywhere, and he was by no means certain that this was for the good of the Arab race. Already he had had several offers for his piece of land, but he had disdained the lure of gold, being content to remain a peaceful peasant farmer, if by no means an industrious one.

As I watched Sayid I saw one of a people who for many generations had for ever a hand in close proximity to the sword. In practice, the

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sword had been but seldom lifted, and such strength as was Sayid's, and that of his fellows—for he was no Bedouin—had been found in infinite patience and an amazing ability to subsist in times of famine and stress in a land where even the jackals run gauntly and weakly beneath the bright radiance of Bethlehem's star. All he desired was to be allowed to scratch his land, and to live in peace. These tractors, and these steel ploughs which tore up the earth on the community farms of the emigrants, he regarded with distaste, and no small fear.

Sayid told me that his first disquiet had come before the great Conflict, when the old slipshod Turkish governors and tax-gatherers gave way to the bright, quick-moving nominees of the Young Turks. These products of Western contact had brought forms and regulations with them, and had even required Sayid to inscribe with quill and gall upon the dotted line.

As Sayid explained, this was impossible, for he could neither read nor write, but the ways of bureaucracy were not so easily denied. His thumb had been seized with rough and insolent gesture, and its inked imprint had done duty for the hirsute cross which, from time to time, he had employed in the absence of more fanciful calligraphy.

Under the Old Turks there had been the

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stranglehold of the taxes, but Sayid had always had the satisfaction of arguing his cause. Under the Young Turks pieces of paper were brandished in his face, and he was coldly informed that there could be no argument and no respite.

Then around him he had watched the sudden evolution of Arab nationalism. What the Young Turks preached they sought for a while to put into practice, and inroads had been made into old shibboleths. The Young Turks preached the word "Brotherhood" in its relation to the Moslem peoples, and the Arabs speedily absorbed the principles of partnership. They began to believe that they were as good as the Turks, and until they raised their voices too mightily, and the millstone of subordination was re-imposed upon their necks, they were encouraged in their views.

Sayid, although ready to believe that he was as good as any Turk, and far superior to most, was not concerned so much with politics and secret societies, as having enough wherewith to satisfy the simple tastes of his household in order that he might recline at leisure beneath his trees. He asked nothing better, but whether he would have it or not, he was caught up in the political swirl. He was told that taxes should be, and must be less, and that touched the silver which he had secreted beneath his lintel.

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When Allenby came to sweep the Turks beyond the furthest confines of Syria, much had been poured into his ears. The Arabs of Egypt had shaken free of Turkish dominance, even if, in so doing, they had sold their freedom to another Empire, and the Arabs across the Jordan, and especially in Holy Mecca, together with many beyond Mosul in the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates, were ready for revolt.

With the Great Conflict, the most amazing things came to pass. The same Empire which was said to hold Egypt in thralldom poured unceasing streams of gold and rifles into the laps of the Arabs, and one Feisal rose to such eminence that his star even transcended that of the revered Sherif of Mecca, his father. The most extraordinary tales were told. The Arabs were to hold such land as they conquered from the Turks. Across the Jordan the Arabs swept on, even unto Damascus, while in Palestine, by assisting the all-conquering Infidel, the Arabs were informed that all would be well.

Still more amazing things happened. With the end of the Great Conflict, the victorious Feisal held on precariously to a small portion of Syria, and then only by means of thousands of golden sovereigns despatched to him each month by a kindly disposed British Treasury.

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Inscrutable black eyes gazed at me and Sayid made a gesture of despair.

"We are asked to be patient," he said, "but all this is not easy to understand. Feisal, who warred with the British and was a great ally, was told that what he took he could hold. Most of the land which he conquered went to the French, and the remainder to his brother Abdullah who only played second fiddle in the fighting. Feisal, after nearly precipitating a war with the British with gold given to him by the British, went to Iraq, an alien land, as King. Husein, who was Sherif of Mecca, and who also fought well, eventually lost battle against Ibn Saud who now rules Mecca and the Hedjaz in his stead, and the British looked on."

Sayid evidently desired me to explain, but I had to confess that I could not.

"My brother, Musa," he went on, "sold his land to these Infidels, and they grow crops where none would grow before. Musa is grieved, not so much because of the crops, because these Infidels have rendered him landless. It was, of course, his own fault. The lure of gold Musa could not resist. He declares that he has been robbed, and when I speak to him of his foolishness, he talks of what the Arab Committees in Palestine will secure for him.

"I have no animus against these Jews," he

went on, "but there is much in them that I cannot understand. One of them sought to tempt me with wireless—these mysterious boxes which even the Infidel cannot comprehend. It gave music which interrupted my concentration on prayer, but the same machine also, on the turn of a knob, gave of a discourse by a learned professor, who said he spoke from the College in Jerusalem, which told me much of the ways of locusts. That was good.

"There is good and bad in all of us. These people ferment the grape and drink of the wine, and that is wrong, yet I would not have it in my heart to kill, as have others.

"My brother would have it that as the rain clouds must fall to earth as rain, so does the law of blood draw all Arabs together. He declares this to be stronger than the Law of Islam, which, of course, is wrong. The Prophet's Law must come first.

"There is much in this new order which is good, and much which I cannot understand. Few schools existed before the Turk left, and now there are many. It is right that the Arab should receive instruction in the Koran, and it is right that our worthy young men should go to the great colleges of Jerusalem."

Here Sayid was endeavouring to reconcile the intrinsically hostile; yet he remained cheer-

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ful withal. The swinging of the butter skin within was as music to his ears. The smell of burning aromatic wood waited across the room from an inner chamber, and the sheepskins upon which we reclined were soft. In this, his own environment, he was content—a self-sufficient and dignified person making a fight with old established prejudice.

The Jew, because he was a Jew, he automatically placed on the plane of the money-lender, yet he sought hard to discover compensations. As a Palestinian of the better class, he was ready to welcome the stranger within his gates providing his hospitality was not strained.

In the back of his mind, however, and lacking expression in words, was an innate fear, and that of being socially compromised. His mind was active and his intelligence broad, and it irked him in that he could not fathom the mysteries of international politics. My puny efforts of elucidation only vexed him further, but as a true Arab gentleman he did not show me the door, but ceremoniously ordered coffee.

What would have been his reactions had I informed him that professional politicians were even as he in their inability to see, I tremble to think. It might have given plausibility to the rumblings of his aggrieved brother who, I shrewdly suspect, had expended in riotous

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living the money he received for his land, and was now a pensioner of Sayid.

The coffee appeared, borne in by his wife, heavily veiled. I knew that she was a slave girl who had come in her youth across the Jordan. She was well attired for her station, and her plump arms jingled with the movement of many bracelets. Sayid thanked her for her services gravely, yet with a note of satisfaction and quiet affection.

Well might he be content, for his house and his household was a pleasant enough place. Built of mud-baked bricks and stone, it had soaring palms to give it shade. Inside the walls and floor were mud-plastered, and all was very clean—a testimony to the services of the women within. In a sense it was a noble house, for it boasted of six apartments. That in which we reclined had the inevitable coffee mortar, and many brightly burnished pots and trays. There is no better cleaner for the yellow brass which comes by way of Birmingham and Damascus than the sand of the Palestine dunes.

All was so peaceful that I could well understand that all that Sayid desired was a continuance of this state. He would react immoderately towards that which tended to disturb him, and therein lay his disquiet.

And in the gloaming, as I rode with him to

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the nearby encampment of his brother Musa, we heard female voices in song reaching faintly to our ears from afar. It was a strange feeling hearing European lays in the heart of Asia. Then I followed the turn of his hawk eyes and gazed out into the direction he was looking. I could see what my host could see.

Several girls, barefooted, and barefaced, lightly trod the path which wended its uneven way past his abode, through wheat-fields. They were laughing and singing in snatches, and now and again they would prod the score or so of donkeys which they tended.

They were, as I knew, girls from a Polish settlement not at too great a distance, either returning or despatching donkeys to compatriots in a fellow community. These donkeys would be set to ploughing, and the girls would work in the fields.

Sayid turned to me, his eyes still puzzled. He indicated the passing girls.

"They work shoulder to shoulder with the men," he said. "But look at their shorts, bare knees. Shocking! They sing like sirens as they pass, yet those same tongues can singe and blister, for I have heard. But of women's tongues anon, when you see Musa!"

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled, as if dismissing the thought. He was tired of en-

deavouring to explain the inexplicable—"Allah has willed it so!" and I hope this reveals the mind of a Palestinian Arab of our day.

After a brief stay with the Sheikh, I trekked Eastwards. Crossing the Jordan by Allenby Bridge I was met by the officers of Amir Abdullah, for here I entered his domain. Full two hours in a fast moving motor on a tolerably good metal road, it took me to reach Aman. Built on the slopes of a dry rocky valley, it is a rambling and scattered Arab village rather than a town. A brave effort is being made there to make grass grow, for beyond a few trees at the edge of a shallow stream, there is not much vegetation to speak of.

Low-roofed stone houses are perched on the rocky terraces of the valley. It is like Simla without the vegetation; yet the new palace of the Amir compensates for much. At night when the men of the far off desert sat between their camel loads, and sipped their coffees, I was on my way to the palace of the King of Transjordan.

Heels clicked, as the motor was pulled up in front of the palace. Surely it is a great honour for a mere wanderer like me, I thought, to be saluted in this manner by the sentries till I saw a short thick-set man standing under a flood of lights. Even Amir Abdullah had come

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out to meet me! Now the first impression that one gets of this third son of King Husein is that one is before a rich and benevolent-looking scholar—a man who has just risen from a brown study. The illusion did not belie itself; for at his dinner table sat Arabs, Turks, Surians, Afghans and even Europeans: the food too was international in character. The latter point is of importance, if you bear in mind that practically every item on the table, not even excepting salt, was imported from adjoining countries; for Transjordanian resources are but meagre in this regard.

He talks neither like a King, nor yet as a diplomat. There was no stiff-neckedness about him, he did not choose his words, but spoke and laughed like a human being. His knowledge of affairs and men was comprehensive. He knew more about the Indian Moslems than most Arabs; he talked about King Amanullah and his top hat, and was as insistent in his remarks regarding progress and education as any Western publicist; of a grand Arab Federation he spoke with more than ordinary conviction and hope. "But, Ya Molayee!" said a green turbaned courtier freshly returned from the Haj. "Would these Wahabeen allow" The Amir cut the man short. "Ya, Syyed, I guess your meaning," he said, "I also know the

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sad result of the Wahabi raids upon your village.” And here he bade me take this message to the Moslem world.

“If the Ghazi of Turkey, and the Shah Pahlari have given messages!” he now addressed me, “even I will send a word to my co-religionists. The hearts of my old father and my brothers know what the Wahabis have done to us. But be you all who are present here, my witnesses, that I say it in all honesty that I bear Bin Saud no ill-will, he guards Allah’s House, and may Allah help him, and give us strength to assist him too. Our past quarrels are like writing on the sand. They are gone, the Arab race is one, all servants of Al Islam.” The Amir spoke in such earnestness that it is impossible to forget the scene. We listened with intense silence; a man who had been a Wahabi rose as one possessed, and kissed the hands of that truly great Arab Prince.

Next day when I left Amam for the southern station of Mann on the Hijaz Railway, I was delighted to hear that the Amir had given special orders to his military officers to guide me on my visit to Petra. The City of the red rocks which lay hidden in the heart of Arabia was a mystery till rediscovered by the famous German traveller Burckhardt in the nineteenth century. No one knows the origin or the pre-

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history of Petra; and the earliest known records can take us back no further than the sixth century, B.C.

As you travel by pony up and down the ravines of Wadi Mosa, the scene discloses nothing new to what you have been accustomed since leaving the fertile regions of Western Palestine. Scrub wood, stunted trees, a tuft of grass here, another behind a boulder, and loose rocks mixed with grey earth is all you see. Presently a deep valley opens before you. At the mouth of it, a stream flows languidly, a couple of Arab women are washing their clothes in it, and tell you that it is the sacred pool where Moses struck the rock and water spurted out from the heart of stone: for "Allah had so willed it."

Up and down the barren sides of the hill you walk or ride according to the nature of the path; the dry bed of the stream below is opening out. Three miles you have covered, till in the north-east a curious structure looms in sight. Like small mounds of whitish grey they rise, several of them reflecting the rays of the morning sun, showing shallow pits on their sides like niches. We have come to the outer range of tombs of Petra. Then a wall of rocks rises higher and higher, rampart upon rampart shutting out everything beyond.

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Presently a narrow opening in the rocks leads into a labyrinthic dark passage. Entering this, one winds one's way in the half light; walls of rocks, red and terra-cotta in colour and worn smooth with age, rise higher and higher, and seem to meet above. The passage at one place is so narrow that two laden camels cannot pass abreast. Voices of men assume a tone of murmuring, uncanny whispers are heard, the wind sighs like the breath of a giant dragon as it passes and echoes through the rocky passage. For nearly an hour you are in this bewildering journey; till you round a sharp corner of the Suq, which is this magic passage.

Straight ahead of you the light of the day reveals a red colouration. On closer approach out of the red glow shapes a facade of exquisitely carved rock. This is now called the Khazana, formerly a temple or a hall of audience, supported as it is, by four graceful and huge capitals. The solid red rock is hollowed out into an enormous hall, terra-cotta sand stones show veins of magnificent colour effect in its interior; and the imagination staggers at the thought as to what hands fashioned a marvel of this description.

Further in the valley on all sides there are rock-hewn buildings of the same grandeur. But they are not buildings in the ordinary sense

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of the word, for no piecework is to be seen; all is carved in the living pulsating rock, and the actual rocks form parts of the building. Hundreds of tombs, public buildings, water tanks, temples and altars lie scattered in their unknown historical glory; a reminder of days when Nabataeans flourished and ruled up to Syria and finally gave homage to the Roman legions.

Even now in a moonlit expanse of this fairy-land valley of rock carvings, you could picture the mighty warriors standing guard upon the resting caravans on their way to distant Egypt. Even now you can imagine the long procession of their Queen wending its way up to the highest spur of the rocky defiles, where the handsomest youth of the class was tied to the altar and married to the Queen, and then borne down on the shoulders of the priests. Even now you can hear the distant neighing of the Crusaders' chargers leaving nothing behind but three miles of carved rock which has slumbered in the heart of the desert for centuries together. Nothing but Allah remains: and so much for the glory of man.

But history is one thing, and local belief is another. Note what I heard from Abou-Zeitun about Petra and its princes. I camped in Petra with Abou-Zeitun and we spoke of the past of the great mortuary city—not merely its Roman

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past, the vulgar novelty of a standardizing race, but the grey antiquity of those days when it was Selah, city of the rock, ere yet it had even been conquered by Amaziah, who gave it the unpardonably hideous name of Joktheel.

Abou-Zeitun and I smoked our chibouques, and spoke of things unknown to the European archæologist—things at which, indeed, the wisest wizard of Western science will never guess—among others, of how Petra was the foundation of Esau, that mighty hunter, dispossessed by the slim Jacob, of the Horim, the cave-dwellers who formerly inhabited the site, and of the Nabatheans who followed them, the descendants of Esau by his “accursed” marriages with the Canaanites.

For miles on either hand stretched the extraordinary panorama of black rock, architected by the chisels of Nabathean and Roman into temple and aqueduct, arch and sculpture and votive tomb. Immediately behind me a group of colossal figures representing centaurs were placed on each side of a portico of lofty proportions, with only a single broken column, excavated entirely from the solid rock. I pondered on the debate such an undertaking would arouse in any English Town Council, arguments respecting unemployment, rating and trade unions and marvelled.

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The ancient capital of Arabia Petraea, carved out of the red sandstone, has witnessed the coming and going of cave-dweller, Nabathean, Greek, Roman and Arab—the Arab who seems to be the last heir to all the civilizations of old. But the Arab has a good memory. Bookless, he retains in his poetic mind, and perhaps in his heart, if he has one, the legends of half a dozen civilizations. Abou-Zeitun had an excellent memory. He remembered almost every grain in the bags of fodder with which he supplied my horses, and the market-price of millet at Aden. He almost remembered the legend of Petra, a legend no European has as yet set down in writing.

Petra is as dry and dessicated as Texas, its entire existence in the ancient days depended upon the rain-clouds which clustered round the peak of Mount Sinai, the ancient seat of the thunder-god of the Semites. The cult and mystery of the Nabatheans was associated almost entirely with the making of rain. In their naive philosophy only one thing could conjure down the amount of moisture necessary to the growth of the millet.

But as Abou Zeitun closed his eyes, almost in a reverie, I guessed right that he was trying to recollect the ancient story current amongst his Bedouin folk.

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At last he opened his eyes, and as if impelled suddenly by some inward emotion: "Listen!" he ejaculated. "A strange tale is told of one of those princesses who formerly ruled in Petra in the long ago. You should know that on the year following the rite the Princess ceased to rule the city and could then marry whom she pleased. This lady, whose name was Ashtar, on the year following the horrid ordeal, was wed to a certain noble, but, after the manner of women, who are surely the especial creations of Eblis, demons of disturbance and discord, she cast her eyes on another, and longed to be free of that husband she had taken to herself. And quickly her evil mind discovered a manner of doing so.

"A plague fell upon the valley, and for some moons the rain had not fallen at its proper time. The furious heat and parched soil caused a dreadful distemper of the throat, and thousands perished. Then came this evil Princess to the judges, and said that a sacrifice was necessary to the god of thunder. The judges of the people answered that the usual rites had been made, and that never in the history of the city had they been repeated. But this wicked woman, her heart set upon another, told them that she had had a dream or vision in which the god had appeared to her, and had commanded

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that she be set in the place of the Princess who had succeeded her, and once more bound to the pillars along with the wretched man, her husband, who should be sacrificed to the demon-god.

And so mightily were the judges carried away by her words and so furiously did the people rage for a victim that without delay they took her and seized upon the man, her husband, and bound them to the pillars. But scarcely had they done so when the heavens opened and a frightful peal of thunder crashed above the city. A shaft of lightning descended like a red lance, and striking that evil woman, slew her in an instant. Then came the rain, torrents of it, until the valley seemed like a river, and the people, terrified, sought refuge in the caves and tombs above. Again descended the lightning, but this time on the pillar to which the husband of that devilish witch had been bound, burning through his bonds and setting him free."

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CHAPTER VIII

THE FALSE SHRINE

WHAT WITH listening to the wonderful story of Abou-Zeitun and with roaming about amongst the rock caves and tombs of Gatra, I slept the sleep of the weary: of all places it was in that enormous stone hall called the Khazneh—or The Treasury. It was really a temple of Isis, reputed to have been built by Hadrian in A.D. 131.

Outside it my companions and guide were packing my baggage on pack ponies, as I began to enjoy a last look at the facade of that remarkable edifice. Its two stories—about 65 feet in height—are carved on the face of living red stone: four columns of the first story are broken; but the two central remaining ones are a delight to the eye: and those cornices and pediments strike one dumb in amazement with the skill of their workmanship.

Soon we were wending our way through the long Siq, a gorge leading one out of the caves and palaces and tombs of this Lost City of the

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Desert. Rock walls sometimes rise to one hundred and fifty feet right and left, often the passage between is no more than for two horsemen to ride abreast: there are niches here and there, and a clay water pipe could still be seen embedded in cement.

Passing obelisks, rock tombs, sanctuaries, we reached once again Wadi Musa—the valley of Moses, where near a clump of bushes a mountain-rill was pointed out to me as the Well of Moses. Bedouin women were washing clothes in what little of water was there.

Leaving the rock mountains of Petra behind, we jogged along stony ground, till we arrived at the village of Elji; and thence I took the road—there are no roads as such in the desert part of the country, as the West understand by the word, but here I joined a pilgrimage caravan going down southwards to the Gulf of Akaba.

Travelling through most uninteresting country, which but for occasional pilgrimage traffic would be the most forlorn region under the sun, transversing dry wadis after wadis, wherein nothing grew, nothing lived, day after day we journeyed southwards. Here and there were the ruins of Roman forts, or ruins of what must at one time be caravan *serai* or a khan, on and onward we went.

Our path once during this journey lay along



"Dope friends" in a Dope cafe, Egypt.

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a Roman road, and as it was the crossing point between the pilgrim routes, a little beyond the Wadi Yetem, our caravan leader decided to encamp near a shrine. The most remarkable thing about the shrine was that around it a fair-sized village had sprung up, and the offerings of the pilgrims have been considerable at times.

This was one of those shrines which dot the path to pilgrimages and are essential elements in the homage of prayer which constitutes the merit of the devout. In each of the most important at least a night's watch must be spent, and the more precise the pilgrim, the greater the degree of religious experience he will seek to profit by in their sacred recesses. This one in which I now found myself was a place of peculiar sanctity, the tomb of a tribal patriarch of exceeding virtue, plain and in no wise spacious, yet with something in its atmosphere of brooding sanctity which only tradition and long association can give.

The grey domed interior was packed with pilgrims after sunset, and soon the temperature of the shrine had become almost overpowering in its fetid heat. The droning recital of long passages from the Koran, the pious exclamations, the muttered prayers, had an almost somnolent effect. The walls began to drip with

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moisture, the packed bodies could scarcely find space for their continual prostrations and genuflections. After the free air of the desert, the closeness became intolerable.

Yet the hearts of all seemed oblivious of the discomfort, raised and exalted as they were in an experience of perfervid piety and straining after the divine. At times a prolonged and sacred hush would fall upon the assembled company, which seemed rich and intimate with holy consideration, the deep understanding of generations of men of the reality of the Spirit of God. The night, indeed, seemed not of to-day or yesterday, it won free of the trammels of time, it seemed an hour in eternity, apart from calendars or seasons.

Suddenly, startlingly, out of the pit and deep fall of its silence would rise the voice of an old man strident in the accents of prayer, a deep, resonant monotone, the very fibre of which seemed eloquent of that ancient patriarchal emphasis the East is still so rich in, despite all the onsets of modernity. Thus Abraham might have addressed his God in the cave of Macpelah. To hear such an ancient was to understand the whole rugged past of the desert and of Islam, the long struggle against paganism and infidelity, the certainty that righteousness would prevail, that indeed it was the only pillar to

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which man might cleave in a sinful world, the very roof-tree of man's house.

A great murmur of response would arise like a sad and mournful wind, lofting to the little dome which threw it back in hollow and chorus-like echo. The sincerity of that night I cannot hope to convey in words. When man is so caught up, 'rapt in the spiritual, any words which seek to picture his state, must seem as things cold and counterfeit, like those blocks which engravers make to mimic the glories of Nature, but which, however lovely the pictures they may imprint, seem in themselves colourless and imbecile.

But this at least I may venture in the very beard of the scoffer that the Muslim's truest ecstasy and most exalted joy are to be found in that communication with his Maker which is the highest and all-too-neglected privilege of man.

In an extraordinary contrast to this real shrine was one just near Akaba, which although now desolate and of little account to the discerning, still receives a few offerings from the marauding gangs of the Bedouins of the desert. It is called the Shrine of Sulaiman; and its history as faithfully related to me, should be a lesson to indiscriminate shrine-hunters.

During Abdul's occupancy, the place had

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grown in fame as a cure-centre of all sorts of diseases. Pilgrims, too, visited it from far and near, the well-meaning had sat in meditation before the shrine to purify their souls, the childless had tied little bits of red rags to its bushes to be blessed with children, the blind had offered gifts to have their eyesight restored; and Abdul sat mute, collecting offerings.

One Sulaiman, his devoted disciple, attended to all the wants of the old priest. He prepared Abdul's sleeping quarters in an alcove, he prepared his meals, and on holy days, even washed his master's feet.

Sulaiman gave years of service and asked for no reward, other than a small share of the rice, which was brought the Faithful for the use of the priest. He was a true ascetic, and dear to the old man's heart. Then, one day, the old Abdul fell ill. He thought that he was dying. Sulaiman cared for him, and nursed him back to health. The illness, however, caused the old man to think somewhat of the future. He summoned his faithful disciple.

"Sulaiman," he said, "the time has come when we must think beyond the present."

Sulaiman knelt, and touched the old man's feet with his hands.

"Rise, my son," said Abdul, "you have been a good and devoted servant of the shrine, and

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I—I am getting old. The time will be when I must nominate a successor. You Sulaiman, have shown yourself to be worthy.”

Sulaiman made a double obeisance. “Master,” he said, deeply affected, “I am unworthy.”

“That will not always be,” went on the priest unctuously, “to qualify yourself and to attain that level of sanctity, which is incumbent upon he who would cherish the shrine, you must do even as I. You must depart from here. You must scour the highways and byways, and you must live on that which is offered. You must travel from shrine to shrine, meditating long at each. Gradually you will attain that eminence of thought which creates the priest from the mere mortal. You will yourself know when that time comes. Then return here—and you shall inherit the shrine.”

“Master!” breathed Sulaiman, once more.

“You will walk abroad, as I did,” proceeded the Mullah. “As a mark of special favour, you will carry the staff which assisted me on my lengthy journeys. And,” wound up the old man, impressively, “in order that you shall have a link with me here, you shall have my old donkey. You will walk on your travels until you are fatigued. Only then will you mount my donkey, for he is old, like me.”

Sulaiman departed on his wanderings, with

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the staff and the donkey as his companions. He regarded the staff with reverence, but the animal he placed upon a plane above all things. He cared for it as he had once cared for the old Mullah. He often went hungry that it might eat and frequently, when passing through the sandy places of the desert, he subsisted on the minimum of water so that the donkey might drink its fill. Never once did he attempt to ride it, no matter how long the trek. He associated the animal with the shrine and its holy custodian. He regarded the beast with veneration.

Months later Sulaiman had crossed both desert and high mountain passes. He came at length to the wilds of the rocky mountains, and emerged on to the desert once again. Often he was in very bad straits, for there were few people to make him offerings, and the water-holes were far between.

Still, however, he persisted in the attainment of his quest—that degree of moral elevation which would qualify him for the life's work that awaited him in the shadows of the desert village.

The way was hard, both for the man and the donkey, and it was the donkey that gave out first. As the Mullah had said, it was old, very old.

For days it had dragged its footsteps, its

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long ears drooping wearily over its great, over-heavy head; then right off the caravan route and miles from any sort of sustenance, it crashed to the ground. It was finished.

Sulaiman was beside himself with grief. To him the animal was much more than a donkey. It represented so much that was dear and sacred to him.

He thought little of his own plight, but only gazed at the carcase before him. When he looked up, he saw in the sky, afar off, tiny black dots. They were the vultures waiting—ready to descend when he should continue on his way.

He resolved that his old friend should not become carrion in his end. Frenziedly he scooped at the sand with his hands. He made a shallow depression. He dragged the donkey into it and raised sand upon its body. It made a mound.

He sank back exhausted after his efforts and gave consideration to his own plight. He sat wearily upon the sands, his head between his hands. He sat there for hours, waiting for the inspiration which would guide his footsteps.

He was recalled to this world by sounds of distant noises. He gazed into the direction from which they came and he discerned an approaching body of horsemen. He was saved.

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As the horsemen trotted nearer, he began to have qualms. He was there in the desert with what unmistakably was a grave. He pondered.

He was in a dilemma.

If he told the men of the cavalcade that he had buried a donkey, they would think him mad. Failing that, they would disbelieve him and declare that it was the body of a man whom he had probably murdered. If he told them that it was the body of a man, they would be inquisitive in their questioning, and they would trip him up. And, these men of the desert were very ready with their knives. It was a discomfoting outlook.

The riders came nearer, and he was still undecided as to what course of action he should take.

One of the men detached himself from the party and cantered towards Sulaiman.

"What ails you, friend?" he demanded. "The Sheikh of this place would have speech with you."

Sulaiman bowed his head in his agitation, unable to formulate an answer.

The rider took in the situation. "I observe your grief, brother," he said sympathizingly, "I can see that you have lost your leader. The holy one has become overcome by the rigours of the desert."

"Aye!" responded Sulaiman brokenly.

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The man cantered away and conferred with the Sheikh. The entire body of horsemen came towards Sulaiman. At a short distance, the Sheikh dismounted and approached the distracted figure.

"Holy man," he said, "I observe you at the shrine of your venerated leader. The grief which you betoken tells me that he was a good and saintly man. My men will supply you with food and water. Remain here for your prayers and meditations. I will see that you come to no harm."

Sulaiman could do no more than gaze at the mound.

The sheikh departed, and he kept his promise. A regular supply of food was forthcoming and men came to that part of the country and searched until they found a site for a well.

The men, beholding Sulaiman crouching by the mound, mistook his mental lethargy for profound meditation. Some of them brought flowers from a distant oasis, and placed them on the mound.

The story gradually got round. The holy man sitting out in the desert was under the protection of the Sheikh. He remained at the site of his great and illustrious leader. Others brought sweets and flowers as offerings to the holy man.

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Sulaiman remained. His inspiration was yet to come. The flowing of the offerings increased, and before he quite realized it, he found that he was the guardian of a shrine. He wrestled long with his conscience and would have told the truth, but things had gone too far. Those who came to pray at the shrine would never believe him, if he told them that the mound represented the earthly remains of an ass.

The fame of the shrine grew. There were those who declared that it was imbued with great healing power. There were others, who said that the Mullah was strong in prayer and was, indeed, a very holy man.

Eventually the fame of the shrine percolated through the desert, and across the mountains, until even those pilgrims, who had been wont to travel to the other shrine heard of its sanctity.

Some of them side-tracked Abdul's shrine, and made lengthy journey to that of Sulaiman's. They returned with stories which enhanced the popularity of Sulaiman's shrine. Others followed in their footsteps, and the flow of coins into the bowl before the old Mullah at the desert village shrine gradually dwindled to vanishing point.

This worried the old Mullah, for he was proud of his shrine, yet there was little that he

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could do. He realized that he had a very strong rival. His offerings grew less and less, until they were confined to those proffered by the local people.

The old man, after much thought, decided to visit the other man's shrine. It was a long and wearisome journey for old Abdul, but he was determined to find out as to how a perfectly new shrine should beat his in sanctity; for he had been at the job nearly two score years and three, and he eventually got there.

Abdul made obeisance before the bearded figure of the custodian of the new shrine, even as other pilgrims were bending low before Sulaiman.

A voice he knew well came softly to him. "Know me not, Master?" it said. "Do you not observe Sulaiman, your disciple behind this beard?"

The old man trembled and looked again.

"It is indeed, Sulaiman," after a long pause, "Sulaiman, who left me to attain spiritual elevation."

"Master, master; I have much to tell you. I have a confession to make, confession which can be made only to you." Sulaiman bowed his head in his distress.

"I have long waited for this moment," he went on, his voice betraying his agitation.

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“There is much on my conscience. And only you can know, Master. There is no one else to whom I can pass on my burden.”

“My son, what is it?” the old Mullah asked gently.

Half-weepingly Sulaiman told his story. “The shrine which you see here, and which the folk believe to be filled with such holiness,” he added in conclusion, “this shrine to which thousands of pilgrims come to make their offerings, contains nothing more than the body of your dead donkey.”

The old Mullah pulled at his beard, and ruminated.

“What can I do, Master? What can I do?” Sulaiman broke in.

Still the old man pondered.

“Master?”

The old Mullah stirred. He gazed gravely at Sulaiman. “I am old,” he said, “and the world is ever changing. Your shrine here has transcended in popularity even that which is in my desert village. The offerings at my shrine have dwindled—gone!”

“Master!”

“It is as well.” The old man was impressive. He retained that gaze that fixes men. Then he spoke again.

“It is as well, Sulaiman, that you should not

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have asked me much beyond your daily prayer whilst at the other shrine; and let the matter rest at that, for I am infirm and old and shall just reside with you here; for the shrine that I tended for forty-three years was no other than the resting-place of the bones of a donkey. That animal was the father of the one which you have enshrined here."

"Yes, Master," breathed Sulaiman in relief, "I understand."

Descending from the Wadi Yetam, as our caravan had yet to transverse the plain before reaching Akaba, and heat was overpowering, it was decided to pitch our tents in the plains for the night. Not far off was a desert sheikh's encampment, who hearing that at least some of us were pilgrims, promptly invited us to share his board. But as my immediate need was water, because my pony had not had a drop for more than thirty-eight hours, I searched for a water-hole.

A Bedouin guide indicated three heaps of stones some two miles away, they marked the places of wells; the only one to which I was able to reach before nightfall was more or less choked with sand; and what little of water there was, could only be procured by lowering a man down, and then pulling him up with the leather bucket full of saltish water. With this I

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served my mount as best as I could; and was in time at the supper table of the Sheikh.

Sheikh Ahmed was a powerfully-built man, who sat surrounded by my caravan fellows, and was interested and relieved to hear that we have had no encounters with the roving gangs of the raiding Bedouins.

Outside the low black tent where we sat, the limitless sandy waste stretched till it met the stark-naked rocks of Akaba hills beyond. Nothing was stirring, nothing moved, only the Sheikh's camels were being brought back to the encampment from the watering-holes. The entire plain was dipped in a golden light of setting sun.

After the repast Sheikh Ahmed regaled us with the stories of the desert; but of all of them the one which baffled me most was the tale regarding Prince Malik Nasir of Egypt from whom he traced his ancestry.

That there was such a person as Malik Nasir in Egyptian history is known, but how he could have escaped from the wrath of his ruling brother into the land of Sinai, and thence to Baghdad, and his descendants spread out in the desert was certainly an intriguing story.

"Walahay, you do not believe me!" he ejaculated, "then I shall recite you the ballad which tells of the Prince from whom we are

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descended." Turn by turn eight men recited the Desert Song till I, if not others, was sorry to have accepted his hospitality because by the time the recitation finished it was well past midnight, and we had already quaffed more than eighteen cups of coffee each.

It all related to Prince Nasir who, as a political refugee, is said to have joined a pilgrim caravan going to Mecca. On the way a rich doctor lost a purse containing his savings. This pouch the disguised prince had found and gave back intact to its owner. The Doctor, being a holy man, promised that he would pray to Allah for the honourable man when they would be facing the Great Shrine. He is believed to have prayed hard; and invited the disguised prince to accompany him to his home in Baghdad where he practised the art of healing. Now the story is so priceless in its delineation that it had better be given in the words of the man who recited it, for its odd phraseology lends enchantment to the climax.

When they had arrived there, the Prince said to the Khaja: "Doctor, I will not be an expense to you. I can make clothes as well as any man: please recommend me to some tailor of your acquaintance." The Khaja placed him with the most noted tailor of the city; who, to try his new lad, gave him cloth to cut out and make a suit

of clothes. Malik Nasir, who had excited the admiration of the master-tailors of Cairo, could not fail to succeed at Baghdad. He made a suit of clothes, which his master liked so well, that he showed it to all the other tailors of the city, who confessed that it was a masterpiece of their art. The tailor was well satisfied to have so expert a journeyman, that he gave him twelve pence a day so that the Prince had enough to live handsomely upon in Baghdad.

This was the Prince's condition, when one day Doctor Abu Yunus, who was a man of ungovernable temper, fell out with his wife, and, in the heat of his anger, said to her: "Be gone! once, twice, thrice, I repudiate thee."

Although it is against the Islamic injunctions to utter thuswise. He had no sooner pronounced these words than he repented of it, for he loved his wife; nay, he would have kept her in his house, and lived with her as before; but the Cadi opposed it, and said, that a khulla must lie with her first; that is to say, that another man must first marry, and then divorce her; after which the Doctor might marry her again if he pleased.

The Khaja, seeing himself under a necessity to submit to the laws, resolved to take Prince Malik Nasir for his khulla. "I had best," he said to himself, "take for a khulla this young

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man whom I brought from Mecca to Baghdad; he is a foreigner, and an honest fellow; I can make him do what I will. He shall marry my wife to-night and to-morrow I will prevail with him to divorce her." Having taken this resolution, he sent for the Prince, shut him in a chamber with his wife, and left them together.

The lady had no sooner set her eyes on Malik Nasir than she fell in love with him, and the Prince, on his side, liked her very much. They discovered their thoughts to each other, and omitted not to give one another all the proofs of mutual affection that the place and opportunity afforded them. After many reciprocal feelings, the lady showed the Prince several caskets full of gold, silver, and jewels. "Do you know," said she, "you man, that all these riches belong to me! This is the cabinet that is to say, the portion that I brought the Doctor; and which by divorcing me, he was obliged to restore to me. If you will declare to-morrow, that you will not part with me, but keep me for your lawful wife, you shall be master of all this estate, and of my person." "Since it is so," replied Malik Nasir, "I promise you I will not part with you: you are young, beautiful and rich. I might chance to make a worse choice. When the Doctor comes, you shall see how I will receive him."

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Very early the next morning the Doctor opened the door, and came into the chamber. The Prince met him half-way to the room with a smile upon his lips, and said: "Doctor, I am obliged to you for having helped me to so charming a wife." "Young man," answered the Khaja, "turn towards her, and say: 'Be gone! once, twice, thrice, I divorce thee.'"

"I should be very sorry for that," replied Malik Nasir; "it is a great crime in my country for a man to repudiate his wife. It is an ignominious action, and husbands, that are so base as to be guilt of it, are reproached with it as long as they live. Since I have married this lady, I will keep her."

"Ah, ah! young man," said the Doctor, "what means this language? You do but jest with me."

"No, Doctor," answered the Prince, "I speak the truth. I find the lady to my mind. You think no more of her, for it would be to no purpose."

"O heaven," cried the Doctor, "what a khulla have I made choice of? How prone are men to be mistaken in their judgments! Alas! I had rather he had kept my purse, than that he should keep my wife."

The Prince continued firm, so that the Doctor, losing every prospect of altering his



MOSLEM PILGRIM WITH GUIDE AT JEDDAH

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resolution by fair means, went to the Cadi to complain of the khulla. The judge laughed at his complaints, declared that the lady was no longer his: that she lawfully belonged to the young tailor; and that he could not be compelled to divorce her. The Doctor fell into despair at this adventure. As this misfortune told upon his health, he became ill and the malady progressed from bad to worse.

When his end drew nigh he desired to speak with the Prince. "You man," he confided, "I forgive you for detaining my wife; I ought not to take it ill of you; it was the will of Allah that it should be so. You remember that I prayed for you under the golden shrine at Mecca."

"Yes," said the Prince; "and I remember, besides, that I heard not one word of all your prayer, and that I heartily said amen, though I knew not to what."

"Hear then," replied the Doctor, "what were the words of my prayer: 'O my God! let all my estate, and all I hold dear, become one day the lawful portion of this young man.' "

The story of the Sheikh's ancestry may or may not have been correct, but being in his tent reclining against the saddles of camels and on hay mattresses, certainly gave my tired bones a rest. I wished, however, that the story though entertaining, could have been related

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with brevity and with less poetical garnishing of verse.

And as the moon was rising slowly, we bid good-bye to the Sheikh. As I walked towards my encampment, where I was to sleep upon the hard, stony ground with only a blanket as my bed, I looked up and saw the huge, yellow shield—the face of the moon—smiling on the dark and dense walls of Akaba Hills now only a day's march.

Through the large entrance gate on the two sides of which rise towers, we entered Akaba, and its khan or the rest house of pilgrims swallowed us. Here, too, I was to detach myself from the pilgrims going south-east, for I wanted to meet another sheikh in the neighbourhood.

Now this sheikh wanted those who hungered after adventure. The nature of adventure he would reveal to one whom he might employ. Personally, I was not over particular to inquire about the nature of the work, so long as I could be travelling and have a bit of life's experience. These experiences I shall describe in my next chapter.

As desert towns, or shall I say, villages go, Akaba is a disappointing place: mud huts, some orchards, may-be now some better methods of landing. It could be of some interest to

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Christians because near about it is said to be the Elath of Scripture. Some of its inhabitants are reputed to possess a letter from the Prophet Mohammed, and I was actually shown a grotto wherein the letter was kept, as a Holy Sanctuary, for some time. As to what happened to it, and whether there was indeed a letter of that kind, no authentic record exists. The only importance that the town might now have is that it lies on the pilgrim route to Mecca, and here I was to meet the Sheikh who set me apace upon a strange quest—the tracking of Dope Merchants.

IN GRIPS WITH DOPE-SMUGGLERS

CHAPTER IX

IN GRIPS WITH DOPE-SMUGGLERS

SHEIKH AHMED, in outlining my programme of work, suggested my first of all tasting opium. My refusal meant two things. So far as the reaction of the drug was concerned, I had seen more than enough in the opium dens of Singapore on the faces of other people; secondly, not being sure of myself, I feared that if ever it touched my lips, the cursed habit might grow on me.

“But Afundum,” he insisted, “you misunderstand. If you are to track down the dope smugglers, you must know all about these drugs, even . . . even about their effects on your own system.” I could not help feeling that, as he spoke, he was perhaps over-conscious of his duty of being a high officer of Anti-Dope Intelligence, under whom I had to work. Another that he did not tell me, but which I knew, was that opium trade no longer passed through his isolated Red Sea port to the lucrative European markets, and thus reduced his income very

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considerably. Was it that fact that made him so sore against the smugglers?

"You leave it to me, Ya Sheikh," I replied at last, "there will be enough time for such experience when I am on the dope ship."

He hoped that there might be sufficient adventure for me in the mission that I was undertaking, "and there," he pointed to the slight discoloured patch of the sea lapping upon the coastline in the distance, "shall you see the boat—the boat——" he grinned.

"Yes, the dope ship," I drew in my breath, "the fiendish field of my first conquest—In-shaallah—if Allah wills!"

The black Sudanese slave now placed the coffee pot before the Sheikh. From it he poured two cups not of coffee, but a delicious saffron-coloured tea, which is so much liked in Central Asia. It had, too, just the right degree of cardamom flavour.

That an Arab should break the tradition of his race by drinking not coffee but tea, because his guest preferred that beverage, I considered a high tribute to myself, and said so to the Sheikh.

Then a thought leaped into my mind. I fished out my small bottle of smelling salts. My host and superior officer was sorry that I had headache. He thought that the tea would put it away more readily than my remedy.

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So it would, till a well-timed sneeze shook my hand, and during the swift actions that followed, a few crystals of the salt were dropped in the cup. Presently I stirred the tea. It was as I had expected. The tea lost its transparency: for who does not know that ammonia when mixed with the tannin of opium clouds the liquid?

I merely looked hard at the Sheikh.

He spoke next: "Your first battle is won, Afundum," he smiled, "you will track the dope-men all right. But take care that you go back to your country alive!"

The Sheikh played no further tricks upon me for the next three days that I stayed with him, while waiting for the dope ship's arrival. Nor did he come to the jetty to see me off, for he would have laughed at my artificial beard; but two of the sailors on the gangway looked somewhat wonderingly at my canvas hold-all and the basket of dates.

Just behind our cargo boat sailed in a giant liner; and when some first class passengers of it peered down on me, sitting as I was, squatted on the deck, I wondered whether they knew of the endeavour to stop dope traffic which was saving many a rich and poor alike from the "jag" of the dreadful drug—a drug which may cut short men's lives by at least twenty years.

The two Indians, who got on the boat with me, were busy washing their loin cloths in a narrow passage allotted to us as deck passengers, when a sailor came to say that the captain wanted to see me. As I entered his cabin, I could have leaped with joy, for in place of finding only one of the arch-smugglers in the person of Demitri, there were three more of equal ill-repute with him. I had not looked at their photographs for days together for nothing, and now one quick glance was enough to show that the whole bunch was there.

"So you think that you are very clever?" huskily asked Demitri. The captain's uniform off his person, he looked every inch the high priest of smugglers. "Speak!" he demanded.

"My wits are confounded, sir," in assumed innocence I replied. "Perhaps you are thinking of my double!"

He threw me a copy of a code telegram, which I had received only two hours before boarding his vessel. There was no further use in lying, and I owned up to being an investigator, and asked him as to what he wished to do with me.

"Do with you?" growled the other Greek ruffian, "boil you in oil: only that oil is too precious for boiling dogs in!"

Now I knew from our information that



BEDOUINS IN FESTIVE MOOD

Demitri's crew was at the point of mutiny, for he was not only a hard task master, but a bad payer. At times he would take a lash even to his stokers, which is the most serious crime in seamanship. He had been putting off his men by saying that when he had more "cargo"—meaning opium, from three more ports, and is successful in getting the stuff over to Italy, thence beyond where everybody will be well paid.

In effect he was right; and it was to trap his entire gang, who will be supplying him with dope at various points up to Suez, that I was on that boat for the risky job.

If I had any means of communication to inform the coastal police, of course, I could have shortened the job. But Demitri had other plans. He did not need now to touch any intermediate ports before Suez, where he would receive something like 700 kilos of raw opium. From the other two, he already had got nearly two thousand kilos.

The tall talk of boiling me in oil was soon out-voted, as they did not have the desire to add another murder to their already long list of crimes; so they merely had me flung amongst the monkey-nut bags, hide loads and, of course, the opium sacks. The heat of the hatch, the stink and the darkness of it all, beggars descrip-

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tion, especially when rats and vermin were my only companions in the hold for days together.

Those of you, who may have had similar experiences of acute mental and physical distress, also know that given a fairly good confidence in your mission, the awful plight sharpens that peculiar sense which works out the means of escape in the human brain with remarkable clarity. My mind, therefore, was not at all dull, nor were my limbs and teeth; for I had planned a single-handed attack, a way to get back my revolver and ammunition, and my teeth gnawing incessantly at the rope round my wrists and feet had given me freedom. Even two of my artificial teeth had worked for the common good.

Without lionizing myself, I must say that it was pretty smart work to get out of the hold, and just as that slick action was unexpected from one fed on pea soup and bad fish for four days, my lunging at the armed Zulu guard in the galley so terrified him in the half-light that in place of drawing his revolver, he glared at me as if he were seeing a ghost.

Instantly, however, gathering his wits, he heaved his giant structure towards me. I ducked, and his chin cracked on the iron bars. His weapon now being in my possession, I gagged and tied him up.

IN GRIPS WITH THE DOPE-SMUGGLERS

But as I climbed up, a faint sound of exotic music struck to my ears. Crawling on my belly, I was being drawn towards that slow soft sound. Then a woman's voice burst into song; there was the mystery of the sea in her throat. I drew nearer and nearer, as does a cobra to its charmer, and peeped through the chinks of the saloon door.

The Greek bully was half off his seat, his two other companions were not too wakeful, and yet the girl sang on. And I lay on the deck as one lost in a dream, forgetting that we had entered the Suez Canal, and would soon be nearing Ismailiah, which lies on the last lake before Port Said; and Ismailiah was to be the point of our attack on these robbers of world's souls.

Trembling again her voice rose, creeping through the hushed air, blending with the whispering of the calm sea, and the waving moon of past midnight laughing over it all.

And the singer! The Houris of Paradise must be like unto her. Her long jet hair, her sparkling eyes, her arching eyebrows meeting like scimitars. Oh, Allah, I sighed, such beauty amongst such villains! The rippling music must have made me drowsy, and then sent me to sleep; and then a rude momentary awaken-

ing came upon me, only to feel a heavy thing descend on my head and I fell amongst myriads of stars.

"Pour a little brandy in the dog's mouth!" was the gracious remark which woke me to a slight consciousness. Cool and fragrant fingers were adjusting a bandage upon my brow. Now she bent over me, I could scent her perfumed robes of red silk. I let the wine trickle down my cheeks, not a drop would be allowed through my pressed lips. Demitri kicked me to a sitting position.

"Now," he asked, "what is your price? . . . Partnership in a good business, or . . ." He nursed the revolver which I had before becoming romantic over the music. "Speak!" shouted the other confederate. And I knew that death was near; and dying men are desperate.

"Give me your knife! I shall cut his throat!" roared Demitri, meaning business, till the other fellow refused saying that he did not wish his knife polluted by dog's blood. But suggested that I could be made to co-operate with them if I were made an addict of opium. "Why keel queekly—keel very slow with dope," he added.

And then there was nothing for me—a hand and foot bound man, than to swallow the horrid liquid, in which even before me they had dis-

solved some opium. When two knives are pushed between one's teeth, one is pulled up and the other down, and the head held down, the swallowing becomes a necessity or one would die with choking, especially when the nostrils are pinched.

It was bitter stuff, that opium; though mixed with a little sugar, but it was horrible to see the four of them eyeing me with interest whilst the drug took effect.

In a short while I asked for some water to drink. I drank more water, I was getting thirsty beyond measure. Slowly the fatigue which was overpowering me was lessened. My head was clearing up. I began to blink my eyes as if a cloud was being lifted from my very being. Then a sort of spider started to run up and down my spine, giving a queer ticklish feeling.

Then I was smiling. A remarkable happiness stole upon me. Actually I began to think well of those four fiends, whom only a few minutes ago, I would have slain. I felt that they were really very nice folk. I must have mumbled something expressive of my passing friendliness to them, for Demitri himself lumbered up to a chair, and then helped me up to a sort of shake-down divan. My imagination began to brighten up. I could have written poetry. I felt at peace with the world, when my eyelids be-

came heavy—finally I sank into a sleep of the dead.

Next day, about noon, when I awoke with a jerk, I found myself again in the saloon, and although my hands and feet were still tied up, I felt extraordinarily well. The girl, the only other person in the room, took up her violin and began a song. This time, however, I was not inclined to be too romantic, and asked her to give me some water to drink.

Whether the bowl slipped out of her hand, or what it was, does not matter to you, but it just so happened that tripping her, my hands found her throat. She did my bidding by cutting the cord from my limbs. Again I was in possession of a weapon, and tying her up, barred the door of the saloon. And waited; those were awful moments.

And you must remember that my orders were, that those smugglers were to be caught dead or alive. The chance had come my way this time, and as it was now the question of either shooting them as international pests, or of being killed myself, you can understand that I was determined to take no risks.

It was no good to capture only the opium, for the smugglers were the agents, who could always carry on, and could afford to lose their drugs, if only they may be able to save their

precious skins to ply the trade elsewhere in the world. It was necessary to kill off the source of the curse, which admittedly were the agents.

Also by even saving a portion of their opium, they could still get about sixty pounds for each pound sold; and more if the stuff could be taken to morphine dope factories in the Balkans, for a final destination in London's dope dens, where nearly sixteen hundred pounds for a pound weight of dope could be got; and that quantity was enough to make addicts of all the people of Greater London within six days; for two injections to each person were all that were needed to start the vicious circle for ever. These are not my figures, but scientifically examined by a board of experts.

With all these gruesome particulars in my mind, and Ismailiah by now well within view, where any shooting that might take place on board of that ship, could be heard, and help be forthcoming, I tried to force the issue. I had not long to wait, there were angry voices outside the saloon door now: "Open the door, Salama!" shouted Demitri trying the handle. No reply was returned from the girl, as I had gagged her, nor did I speak. "Open that door!" boomed the other Greek's voice. I said that Salama was resting, and it was not convenient to open the door. "And who the devil are you?"

asked the irritated Demitri. "The devil himself," I replied, my revolver ready for action. They swore that in that case they will send me to the devil and with a heave they fell against the door. It gave way, and their bodies were hurled in. I emptied my first shots. Who fell I care not. Demitri, clutching his side, sprayed me with bullets, as climbing over prostrate bodies, I forced my way into the blazing sunlight, and flattened myself behind a top of the hatch.

Then there was a stampede, for a police launch was steaming towards us, and one of our aeroplanes droned in the distance; which seemed part of our programme—worked out possibly after I had left, for they must have had the information that the three smugglers were on board this smuggler's ship.

Demitri was working overtime, for he was now shouting to the Negro confederates of his to lower something or other, and in that rush left off chasing me; and when the rescue party arrived, how my "face was blackened" as the Persians say, upon not finding the three smugglers in the boat, nor could they discover the dope. We searched the ship several times without a single trace of what we wanted; only the woman lay motionless, a leering wound in her chest.

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But the head of the rescue party had grown grey in the traffic before he, having reformed, had joined the Intelligence Service—he it was that advised us to wait till dusk, and allowed the boat to proceed along in charge of other officials.

Sure enough, just before midnight, from our hiding place in the reed-infested island, we saw that black shadows dipped in the water of the lake from the opposite side of the desert. They were hauling something towards the shore. It was a work of but a few minutes to drag out the motor launch, and chase these men, only to find that what they were dragging out of the water were no other than the large canvas bags of opium, which had been thrown overboard during the excitement of the day. After a good deal of third degree application, the captured men informed us as to where the three chief smugglers were hiding even then across the lake. They, too, had thrown themselves into the water and had swum out.

Till daybreak, we could not hunt for those three men. Not that we did not know the mistake of giving the smugglers a half night's start, but it was necessary to get those motor cars, which have what is called balloon tyres, that do not sink in soft sand.

With three cars they hied forth to the Sanai

desert. Till midday no trace could be found; towards late afternoon, the trail was picked up. The three arch-smugglers were half dead with fatigue and exposure; the two revived wonderfully with morphine injections, whilst Demitri, not being an addict, was very ill.

As we were taking our prisoners to their fate, I remarked to a guard sitting beside me, and complimented him upon his stamina, for he had not eaten for nearly twelve hours. "See this, Afundum, and say nothing more," he said, as opening a small tin box he put an opium pill in his mouth. He could not live without the drug.

Shortly afterwards I was in Egypt; and here you do not know Abdul Sami, as a dope-fiend, from any other lounge in the Egyptian cafe-houses. Nor did I, till a long and lean man of definite Bedouin type, approached me in one of the dimly-lit cafes in Cairo. "Oh, Afundum dear friend!" he hailed me, "fancy seeing you in Egypt after so many years! When did you arrive?"

Now he knew perfectly well that he and I had never met before, but he was making an opportunity. Understanding his suggestion, I kept quiet, and let him share my table. Soon the cafe-man brought the pipe.

The smell that rose from the smoke of that



THE SHEIKH'S RETAINER WITH HIS HAWK

pipe did not please my new acquaintance: "Ya, Walud—oh, son," he called to the pipe bearer. "This is not best Turkish hashish!" My host paid nearly seven shillings for the smouldering drug, as he adjusted the pipe towards me.

It would have been definitely wrong tactics, if I would have refused the proffered pipe, for it was at that cafe that I was to get the secret information regarding a load of hashish, which even then was being smuggled into Cairo.

After taking only two short pulls, as I turned the pipe to Abdul, I felt that something potent had travelled up to my brain. First of all there was a slight feeling of intoxication, it grew rapidly, I was feeling joyous, my eyes began to see clearer, I felt as if I could say something very witty. Then I did a thing which I can never account for, unless it was due to the drug, for I landed a slap on Abdul's bald head, and laughed uproariously at my own joke. Fancy behaving like that towards a total stranger! More or less the same reaction had set in in the mind of my Bedouin friend—we now looked on each other as friends, for were we not hashish smokers, and that he was leading me to be an addict, so that he could sell me the drug. He was merely making a new customer.

Seeing this, the cafe-man brought another

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pipeful. Abdul paid for it, and was enjoying it, well, till he no longer could sit on his seat, but rolled to the ground, and was promptly removed to a divan, and thence outside the cafe on the pavement. I very fortunately did not touch hashish any more that night before going home at midnight, only when enough sensibility had returned to me.

The next day again I was at the cafe. So was Abdul. We now hailed each other as old friends, others did the same to us, for a remarkable freemasonry exists amongst hashish drug addicts. That night I paid for Abdul's smoke, whilst cleverly avoiding the use of it myself. And the only other man, beside me, who seemed to be an abstainer was the cafe-man. I did not like his frequently watching me with narrowed eyes.

Determined as I was to play a bolder stroke, approaching him late in the evening, I showed him some pound notes in exchange for which I wanted to buy the hashish. Price did not matter. Practically everybody in the cafe was past caring as to what was going on, for when fresh batches of smokers came, soon their pipes were filled, and within half an hour they were lost to their environment.

Descending to an underground passage, the cafe-man took me to a cellar. Passing through

that we came to a sort of kitchen. There, before me, was nothing but a cooking range made of cement, and covered with tiles. He looked round, and did something with his foot, which I could not notice. Suddenly two men emerged from somewhere, and caught hold of me. They searched me for weapons and papers. They found neither, and as I was a stranger to them, and not an Arab, they felt satisfied that I could not be an Intelligence man, but a genuine smuggler or a trafficker. There the three stood mute for a moment, till the cafe-manager slid a slab from the range.

Under it appeared a construction, like a little recess, lined with metal. Therein lay nearly five thousand pounds worth of the drug, only a portion of what was to be sent in that form through the Sanai desert, and on the trail of which even then men were setting off. I paid in two hundred pounds, and took the promise to have the stuff delivered immediately at my flat. Having thus found the destination of the drug-caravan, I made haste to join the search party, which was on its way to the wadi that led to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea.

By noon the next day, we were hot on the trail of the caravan. Nothing could be sighted as we sped past police blockhouses in the desert, but it was difficult going because we had by then

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only the ordinary cars. When, however, at an outpost, we got the desert cars, which are used for travel on the soft sand, and whose wheels do not sink because of low air pressure covering the same weight per square inch as a camel's foot, we made better progress. It was towards the evening that we spotted a slow-moving camel train, like a dark streak on the pale face of the dunes it was. They were making for Damanhur, where most of the smuggling gangs go to, on the south of Alexandria; for thence, too, much of it can be more easily shipped to Europe.

Can you imagine our disappointment, when on capturing the caravan, we found that the camels were not loaded at all, but were merely such as are periodically taken for sale in the Egyptian markets. Only that they were not sheared in the usual manner. Where then was the drug that they were smuggling?

And yet incidentally, and as often incidental points in such tracking produce good results, someone's hand drifted up to the hump of the camel. That man was only admiring the soft hair of the camel, when his fingers touched something hard. He probed further. The camel-boys were rounded up, whilst we searched, and found that a patch on the hump of each camel was shaved off, and a slab of dark green stuff

was glued to the skin, over which the same hair was placed, and carefully combed back.

When it was counted out, that lot of hashish did not cost more than four thousand pounds out of which only three hundred was to be the share of these Bedouin smugglers, who were running their necks into the noose; while in the market of dope that quantity could be sold for nearly £63,000, thus leaving a net profit of nearly £59,000 to some fat-bellied international crook, who even now must be sitting smoking his cigar in some European city in peace. His agents do the dirty work.

But before I left the shores of Egypt, I had some minor encounters with smugglers, for instance when sitting in a wayside cafe, I noticed that a Greek sherbet vendor had rather high-heeled shoes. He refused to discard his shoes, saying that his socks were holed; but when we had the pair ripped, we found no less than fifty grains of heroin in grease-proof papers carefully nestling in the soles and heels of his shoes.

In another cafe, the drug was found hidden in such places as the handles of coffee pots, in between the hat racks, in the knobs of brass bedsteads, and of all places, in the peak of the cap of a sailor we found a pouch sewn, which contained enough cocaine to keep his whole

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ship supplied for a month. Another curious case was that of an American porter, who had swallowed a rubber finger filled with dope, and which he could pull out in safety, as he had tied it with a fine silk thread to one of his artificial teeth.

In another addict colony, not far from where great liners drop anchor, I saw the dregs of the world. Men and boys from the age of sixteen to thirty were there, only shadows, a blow will kill them. They will steal your knife, your spectacles, your socks even, if they can get just one more "pinch" as they call it.

Three cases there provided me with an object lesson. One was a national of an European country, another a Chinese, and a third a Zulu. The drug had not weakened the Chinese greatly, although he was the oldest addict. The yellow races can stand it longest, but the Zulu lad, only an addict of two years' duration, was ready to be killed by even an ordinary fall from the steps. The third, the European, so the Doctor told me, could not live longer than the age of thirty-five. Pale and haggard were their faces, drooping shoulders, sunken cheeks and chests, their hands trembled as they shook hands with me, and the European found his limbs as if they were made of lead. Then there were some Arab labourers, who had become

addicts, because their master paid half of their wages in drugs, and half in bad food. One of the packets of that wage-drug, which I examined, contained nearly one hundred per cent white chalk as adulteration.

When I left that colony of living-dead-men, I could not help hating the Dutchman who introduced the drug in Java in the eighteenth century, from where it travelled into Formosa, and into the interior of the East, till working westwards, it found a base in Egypt, from where it now goes regularly into Europe. By the time I had finished with Egypt, I had had about enough of that adventure, but a colleague in Port Said gave me some mere facts.

In search of smugglers in deadly poison—a poison which is now gripping the rich and the poor alike, in the form of morphine and heroin addiction, brought this friend of mine to Rome, and even to London. In Rome these two derivatives of opium were making slower progress. In Paris, that city of gaiety and culture, he had to study the traffic, for essentially from there it is said that London is now being supplied with the “White Snow”, as heroin, the deadliest of all drugs, is called.

It costs money to go and entertain in that delightfully exotic quarter of Paris called Montmartre. If you do not know it, do not go there

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alone. Certainly do not take a woman with you, for there is nothing that does not happen there. And enough said, yet this man had to go, it was his job; and his revolver was a great stand-by.

The orchestra was playing lustily "In a Continental City" as he entered the cabaret. The place, he told me, did not differ superficially from an ordinary night club in any European capital. A table dancer was performing, in the middle of the room, one of those fantastic whirls, which so delight the imagination of the older generation. A few "faded flowers" sat about drinking endlessly, but he had no eyes for them, and then he saw the woman that he went to look for.

She was pale, pale even with a lot of rouge. For a time her eyes darted in suspicion as she handed her powder puff to another woman in exchange for three hundred francs. A light sprang into the eyes of the victim, who had sniffed heroin from the drug-seller's powder puff. The "White Snow" was working its magic, for the addict began to talk brilliantly, then a melancholy descended upon them. Their eyes wide open, they sat like two statues, mute, staring at almost nothing, completely cut off from everything surrounding them. Only two grains of white crystals were wanted by a third

addict. She would have parted with her soul to have a sniff, but she had no money; so her fur coat had to go; and so another addict came, depositing her ring, she bought the drug. Many more came, begging, even with tearful eyes they begged for the "White Snow"; a young woman was willing to part with even her jumper, and to go into the street in her undergarments, only if she could have another dose. Three men bought morphine injections, and one just took the needle, and without much ado, jagged himself through his trousers. Well past midnight two smugglers arrived, and the investigator sat up. Even in their disguise, he could spot them. Within a few moments they were off with a suit-case, and he followed them, for they were driving up the northern shores of France in order to get over to the English soil by means of their own launch.

Not far from Curzon Street, in London's Mayfair, these two men were spotted, but escaped; and in the neighbourhood there, he stepped into a sort of bridge club, through the instrumentality of a friend. It cost some money to get admittance, but it was worth it, for the tracing of their lair, and the lair, indeed it was, till cleaned up.

There at that Club, he related that you had to produce a lot of evidence that you were an

addict, and an addict with money. No duke's house could be better furnished than that house was. After tea was served, lamps and syringes and needles were produced by the kindness of the hostess, and everybody helped himself according to his or her requirements of injection, naturally after paying from five to seven pounds for the privilege. The talk became witty, and everybody was happy, even the girl from Canada, who confided in him; he said that she contracted the habit only six months ago, when a friend gave her a few grains to scent in order to cure her headache. The older woman next to her repulsed him, for she jagged herself so badly that her mouth was full of blood, but she liked the "feel of the jag" as much as the drug itself. The next morning that den ceased to exist, for the London police do not sleep over such things.

The worst crime that came under his observation was that of a couple of traffickers, who began to distribute drugged sweets to school children, and actually made a girl an addict to such an extent that she used to sell the stuff for them to her class-mates. Within a month the friendship between that sixteen-year-old girl of good home and the despicable drug-man was so firm that when the girl's aged mother left her home for an exile into France, she was

feeding a tiny child with a bottle. The school-girl paid for her addiction with her life; for she died at childbirth, and the trafficker may be basking in some southern climes.

The truth is, my friend informed me, that it is not in Chinatown that one has to look for the traffickers, but in those quarters where cities' wealthy are known to reside, where it is as easy to buy dope as to have a drink of water. So long as the blame can be put on the poor Chinks, they take no heed of it at all. Besides, now the dope is reduced to ten shillings a "pinch", provided one buys tickets for certain night clubs, or can guarantee to take a party so many nights per week.

One woman, whom the smugglers called "society-lady" had to part with her clothes and car to pay off her dope bill. The difficulty one found about dope was that it is within the reach of the poorest now, provided they can supplement the shortage of money in some way. Everybody is not required to pay money, certainly a pretty girl is not pressed for money.

Many really wonder as to what is the reason of drug addiction. Three predisposing causes came under my observations, firstly the disease, some painful disease; secondly nervous prostration, and thirdly—vice. Anyone, who has received relief from pain, such as follows a bad

fracture of the leg, and to whom morphine injection may be given to relieve the pain, is a potential addict. Nervous prostration is also a very important factor, for man in modern society finds himself too much at disadvantage with affairs. The strain of life is too much for him, and there are greater demands made on his moral fibre, it is under these distressing circumstances of modern life that he, feeling himself unequal to the pace, becomes a moral degenerate and takes to drugs, knowing full well that thereby he will be a wreck sooner than by sheer hard work. He is a moral coward, who refuses to face the world. The third, which is growing mostly amongst young men and women, is the vice, for it is considered to be "smart" to be an addict, and they want an "experience". It, of course, lands them in their graves quite twenty years sooner than their normal time; for once an addict, always an addict.

The tragedy is that in this satanic traffic, millions of pounds are made yearly, and the danger is, for the most part, for the cream of a nation. Only the most intellectual are subjected to the test of refusing its use, which makes it one of the greatest dangers of Western civilization. It is estimated that it can destroy European stamina quicker than at least six

IN GRIPS WITH THE DOPE-SMUGGLERS

wars like the Great War of 1914. And as to what can be done for it, it is not my province to answer; for I do not know how one is to battle with Satan.

HAZARDS IN THE DESERT

CHAPTER X

HAZARDS IN THE DESERT

FROM PORT SAID I took a boat back to Beirut, because my business interest at Damascus required my immediate presence there, and for the time being, I had done enough of log-rolling and adventurous travel. After putting my affairs right at Damascus, I had to go into the interior of Northern Syria, and thence back to Aleppo, and via Turkey was to reach Central Europe.

Very little of interest can be said about my boat travel up to Beirut, except the disappearance of a diamond necklace of a French Colonel's wife on the first night of our journey. The loss was soon discovered, but not too soon before an expert could pronounce that the replaced article was not real diamond but paste: and the man who had something to do with the affair either jumped into the shallow waters when we neared a port—which was considered to be improbable; or managed to go over the shore in one of the coaling tenders disguised as an Arab coolie.

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On arriving at Beirut, I hurried to the house of my Syrian merchant prince, and found that only after a brief stay in Damascus I was to accompany him into the regions of Dumeir, or maybe a little into the range of Jabal-Shargi in order to buy some camels for the Egyptian market. He had already distributed several hundred pounds to the Bedouins as earnest money for these animals; and time was ripe for the journey to get the camels. I was happy to have a chance of once again travelling through that region which is more or less still uncharted; and equally pleased was I to have a few days rest during which I could study the history and life of Damascus.

Next morning I rose early to join the congregation at Mosque of Omayyad, situated as it is at the eastern end of Suk—Hamidiah or the Hamidiah Bazaar. It is one of the most beautiful buildings of its kind, and ranks equal in magnificence with the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. A Roman temple stood at the site, before Theodosius made it into a church—the Church of St. John; and in a corner of the inside of the mosque, I saw a small room where the head of St. John—or Yahya as the Arabs call him—is said to repose even to this day. In its original form, this mosque associated with Caliph Walid must have had a glorious interior as

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the Moslem authors speak of rarest marbles as its flooring and the prayer niches being adorned with precious jewels, and the ceiling inlaid with gold from which hang no less than six hundred gold lamps. As I saw it but a short while ago, even in its tarnished glory its interior is soul-stirring.

This mosque of Omayad in its shadowed intensity, seemed the very home of prayer. As the packed masses in front of me rose and fell in the gestures of divine homage, now upstanding, now bowing, now kneeling, the impression I received was as of trees bending in a gale in a dark forest. The voice of the *imam*, sounding at intervals and the whispered responses of the worshippers seemed the wind flowing and returning through the wooded aisles of the forest, a susurrant noise more elemental than human.

Above us glittered the lamps in the dome, stars in a sacred firmament, remote eyes gazing down upon this world of supplication. Could these be the men I had seen in the bazaar, eager, angry, intent on bargaining, these devotees, each profoundly intent on the approach to his Maker, each sedulously and reverently occupied, to the exclusion of all else, an atonement for sin, on the acquisition of that holiness which all true Moslems so deeply desire?

“There is one God.” The solemn words

boomed forth the greatest fact in the world. One God! How faithfully had their co-religionists throughout the generations adhered to the statement of that basic principle! One God! All of true religion was concentrated in these two solemn words, everything that implies faith, the heart and core of all sanctity.

This is indeed the heart of the Islamic faith, this potent insistence upon the simple and familiar facts of its creed. In its wisdom it admits of no complexities, no theological subtleties. It is simple enough for the most simple and the wise will not quarrel with its simplicity, because in that very simplicity all wisdom is contained. The whole of its loyalty to its Creator is expressed in a few ordinary but telling words.

And the background is as telling as the text. It has an almost Calvinistic bareness and lack of gaudiness, only here and there does the native expression of the Orient display itself in a prayer-mat of rich and divine colour, a splash of radiance against the spotless pavement, or a suspicion of faded gold on wall or pillar. Yet there is little of Calvinistic bleakness. The spirit which fulfils the shrine is much too bounteous in its overflowing warmth to make for a coldness of atmosphere. The reflection of that fervour seems to be caught by the snowy

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walls, its heat and fragrance ascend to the white dome.

And here all men are equal, the pasha and the beggar, the effendi and the simple tradesman, all are reduced to the status of brothers, the creatures of Allah alike. In the East men do not "dress-up"—"to go to church." They go, and they go daily, in the clothes of their condition, profession or trade, they enter the mosque out of the wayfaring of the street, not as nobles or merchants or soldiers, but as men seeking atonement and communion with their Maker.

Soon after the prayer, I surveyed the mosque: and noted that it is really unlike many other mosques: it is a rectangular, perhaps about 400 feet by 130 feet; more or less like a basilica with two rows of columns. The niches nearing the roof are of stained glass. The beauty of its design is fully maintained by its courtyard. A double-storied arcade runs round it; and the Dome of the Treasury, where the funds of the mosque are said to have been kept.

It was just about eight in the morning, and the din of the bazaars—shops open there at eight and shut at sundown—was striking upon my ears like the distant humming of bees. But before I went to see the bazaars, I walked to the Shrine of Salahuddin—Saladin—it is in a nar-

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row lane, its outer aspect appears neglected, but the inside was clean: and thence to the many bazaars for which Damascus is justly famous through the East.

There are, for instance, the spice bazaars where as soon as you enter, you would think that you have arrived in a garden of flowers. Scents, herbs and dry blossoms are for sale at every booth and shop. A little further is the blacksmiths' bazaar, and then the Long Bazaar, a street which is the longest in the whole city; nearby is the bazaar of goldsmiths and the silk bazaar; every nook and corner of each of them is overflowing with humanity, brisk buying and selling is going on, for Damascus is the Mart of the Orient.

And why not, because in the West the shop, after all, is only a shop, even if it be a multiple shop. There is about as much mystery adhering to it as to a railway station. People go there to buy things and that is all, unless it be a village store, where they act as each other's news-sheets in the exchange of local gossip. But in the East, the bazaar, though chiefly and ostensibly for the purchase of goods, is an institution—a political club, an exchange, a resort of the folk, and last, a cavern of secrets as profound as Delhi itself.

Anything may happen to you in a bazaar.

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I do not mean anything alarming or dangerous, for the tales of terror and wonder circulated throughout the West concerning these places are absurdly exaggerated and you may walk through most bazaars, whoever you may be, as safely as in the Burlington Arcade, and with more assurance that your pocket will not be rifled. All the same, the bazaar is the gate of adventure and you may see or overhear things there of which even the boldest romancer would not dream.

Those parts of any big Eastern bazaar dedicated to the sale of provisions differ very little from Leadenhall Market. It is when you come to the sections where garments, metal work and furnishings, jewels and ornaments are vended that you reach the veritable bazaar of tradition. Here you can observe those famous scenes and exchanges of chaffering and bargaining which, like the stories in the weekly journals, are "continued", sometimes ranging over weeks. Here are to be heard the invocations to Allah as to the unspotted honesty of the vendors, the sarcastic replies of the turbaned buyers.

Those two men whom you see chaffering over the price of a rug from Tabriz are in reality discussing the affairs of a visiting merchant of whose financial status they are not convinced. The little brazier talking to the big

fellow in a fez is not trying to sell him the small copper tray he handles, but is gravely questioning him about the amount of backsheesh the police will require from him. That pearl the jeweller, in a black jacket and turban, is holding in his palm beneath the hooked nose of the man in uniform may get sold by Ramadan, or more possibly may not, if his eloquence runs dry.

And, wherever you turn, there is an echo of whispers, for the bazaar is the greatest whispering gallery in the world. What it is all about you will never even guess, indeed the bazaar itself cannot tell. It is just the echo of the inherent mystery of the East, the shadow of sound, the spectre of opinion and hearsay, perhaps fulfilled of momentous truth and probability, maybe signifying nothing. The bazaar is indeed a hive where the bees have stopped working, but where the hum of an apparent busyness goes on incessantly. One half of it is in the world of everyday, the other half in a region where dreams and fancies find us when we leave the beaten tracks of living.

My friend the Sheikh, although a keen business man, yet loved to retain and to glory in the traditional pageantry of his race, for Syrians are justly proud of their past history, and despite the fact that we ought to be taking

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the desert route into the heart of North-Eastern Syria, he persuaded me to wait a few days longer because at the close of the Month of Fasting when the Beram Feast takes place, many Emirs of the desert would come to Damascus in their Royal state—so to speak: and the procession of one of them was certainly worth seeing.

These Emirs have retained their semi-independence, and even the French Mandate, and now the installation of a Syrian Republic has had no effect upon the hoary traditions accorded to these chieftains of the desert, many of them being fabulously wealthy, and even retaining a small army of their tribal men: the procession of one such I was destined to see on the morning of the day when the month of Ramadan closes, giving place to festivity and song in Moslem countries.

Our stand was outside Suk Hamidiah, and practically all important Sheikhs with their retainers had left the mosque; amidst the tense excitement we waited for the last and the most superb procession to pass. It came.

The trumpets blare—not trumpets such as you may hear outside Buckingham Palace, but brass holding a significance a world away in their unusual clamour. Great atabals beat out a rhythm that sends the blood bounding. There

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is the light clattering of twice a hundred hoofs, and the procession passes down the winding street into the square. Here is a magnificence you will not see elsewhere, not the rude blaze of barbarism nor the staid and sombre brilliance of European pageantry, but the grandeur which comes from an Arab civilization which has lasted for centuries—a splendour of jewels and cloth of gold, of snow-white horses, of turban and flashing steel, of warrior faces and soldierly shapes.

The music crashes out in a fantastic march. The great drums pulsate like thunder made into rhythm—such music as the Crusaders might have heard when they clashed with the horsemen of the Soldan, music that would turn a coward into a paladin by the magic of its primitive appeal. The dark faces smile exultantly, the white teeth flash. What a beautiful people this is, heroic, not cramped into the attitudes and postures of business or the humped shapes of labour, but triumphantly human and alive, a nation of fighters and chieftains!

Like grey-brown ships billowing upon a foam of white horses wallow the camels, each carrying its weight of nobility, housed in gold and silver and silk, wise-looking, impassive. Yet not more impassive than the chiefs they carry, each sitting cross-legged in his howdah-like litter, smothered

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in medieval bravery, unseeing, perhaps unhearing, the sons of a hundred generations of power, whose fathers could look back upon another hundred generations when the conquest brought its converted Vikings to rule in England.

Before each of the turretted beasts trips a bevy of sword-dancers, displaying those grotesque motions which their race received from ancient Egypt, possibly three thousand years ago. The warlike eyes shine, the jingle of silver decorations is older than that temple on the hill yonder, these eyes more fathomless than the dark river which flows beneath it. At each fresh outburst of the wild and fevered music they make new and even more extraordinary movements, dancing not with their feet alone as Europeans do, but with their bodies, their eyes, their very hair, they rend the empty air with their naked blades.

The crowds shout their acclamations, none the less ardently because the nobilities in the howdahs take no notice of them. Then come the desert warriors, hardy-looking fellows, lithe and limber, who would give a good account of themselves anywhere, soldiers who are the sons of soldiers, not conscripts, men who have known the fighter's trade for generations before Europe was split into nationalities and who

prefer a hand-to-hand tussle to modern "stone-throwing".

Little by little the music is swallowed by distance. The great drums still echo like a far-off cannonade, the trumpets turn to fairy clarions, only the hills of the camels' backs are visible through the fog of dust. The pageant takes on the appearance of dream—a dream that will long remain in my memory as the recollection of a people's magnificent ebullience.

At last we were on the move north-eastward: the undulation of rocky defiles, mixed with loose sand and crags lay still under a baking sun. Eight camels loaded with food, water and three tents followed the Arab mounts of the Sheikh and myself: a third horse on which the merchant Sheikh had loaded silver coins as price of the camels which we were going out to buy was led by my host's slave Mustafa.

We dipped and rose in between the sand-dunes and waterless ravines; and in that great emptiness I realized for the first time how time means nothing in the desert, life loses its meaning because there man is made to realize how infinitely small, how utterly small he is in the vastness of a desert—a waterless stretch where life depends upon water and the stamina of man to do without water! Nothing lives, there, nothing grows, only here and there you may see the

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rimth bush with its needle-shaped leaves from amongst which tiny white flowers are trying to show their faces as if begging for dewdrops. Here we pitched our tent, and as the territory of wandering Bedouins was not far from us, watchmen were posted to keep guard during the night.

Next morning the dark desert awoke with the sun. It was glittering like a blade of steel, when after a hurried repast and the morning prayer, we descended a stark looking and boulder-strewn gully, to reach the desert village some nine miles due east where there was a khan—a rest house—and the bulk of the Sheikh's money was to be given to those who had been buying camels for him: and it was as well that we attained the heights overlooking the village before dark, because an adjoining tribe but a few hours ago was attacking those who were to be our hosts for the night. The word had got round that our tribal hosts would be receiving some money from us.

The Western mind doubtless conjures up wonderful and visionary details of the caravan-serai or a khan. To the clerk in Battersea or the grocer in Cardiff the very name is doubtless associated with a wild rapture of coloured magnificence which outvies the scenes in the pantomime of Aladdin. Beautiful names have

their own drawback, and a woman may be called Gwendolyn or Barbara and yet be as plain as the proverbial pikestaff.

And this, I am afraid, is the case with the caravanserai. Its musical appellation has been the making of it. But indeed that signifies nothing more than a "house or lodging for passengers by caravan", and one might as well expect visionary delights in the third class waiting-room of a small railway-station.

The caravanserai, like many others where I had stayed, was of one-story abode buildings arranged round a courtyard where the camels and asses were stalled, and divided into places for sleeping and public apartments for eating and converse. Probably many inns and hostleries in medieval Europe were of this pattern, those hospices and herberies where pilgrims enjoyed rest and refreshment between the stages of their journey. I am loath to shatter dreams, but frankly, few of these places are particularly sanitary or free from insect life.

These things notwithstanding, this caravan-serai is not without a strange if distorted marvel of its own. Its ugliness is indeed its beauty, if not fair it is at least fantastic in the manner of a "Flemish interior". The grouping of weird personalities, the vivid dark faces, the amazement of unusual gesture, the splash of unfamiliar

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colours, combine to make up a canvas of oddly grouped life against the sombre background of softly shadowed walls. No painter in his senses but would rush for his palette and brushes, if he were permitted, in such surroundings.

Here where every corner has its praying suppliant, where every square foot of flooring is occupied by small circles discussing politics or religion, or gravely consuming the slender diet of the Eastern traveller, past and present are co-mingled like light and darkness.

And what is more, I do not think the world will ever behold an Orient where the caravanserai is not. You cannot, with all your engineering, criss-cross the desert with railroads or motor-tracks, for sand is mightier than any engineering. It is not improbable that in time the plane may displace the camel and that long lines of aircraft may speed above the sandy oceans from point to point. Even so, the caravanserai will remain, for it allows of a freedom of intercourse which "the best hotels" certainly do not possess and with which they cannot vie. And it is this freedom of intercourse which the sons of Asia love, this opportunity for debate and the interchange of idea and experience which has made the caravanserai as dear to him as his club to the European.

When the Sheikh had finished his business

with the Bedouins, and we had all shared his hospitality, and the story-teller was relating a long-winded tale, there was a great deal of hammering at the *serai* gate. Men ran hither and thither in confusion seeking their weapons, as everybody was scared on account of the desert raid that had taken place only that day. But the mystery was soon solved when the watchman from the tower shouted to say that it was only the "reformed brigand" who sought admittance.

Ali, the one-eyed "brigand", was before a party of elders and was demanding the blood of Selim. The one-eyed one had expostulated with Selim the muleteer until his professional patience had come to an end: and the quarrel being about a woman could only be wiped out with blood. My friend the Sheikh would have no such blood shed in his presence, so a duel was agreed upon: but Ali insisted that it was to take place there and then and in the centre of the *serai*. The two bared their tulwars, and then they immediately joined issue before I realized what was happening.

The tulwar is a deadly weapon and a sweeping blow with it is usually decisive. Arab fencing embraces the whole body as its field and a cut at the legs is usually met by leaping higher than the blade of one's opponent. As the

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combatants met, their tulwars flashed and whistled in the silver light of the shadowy pass, clashed, disengaged and swooped earthward for a fatal leg-blow, the fencers leaping upward at each pass like a pair of fighting-cocks. If Selim was more agile, he certainly had not so many tricks of desert fencing at his command as his wary enemy, whose single gleaming eye seemed to pick out the weakest parts in his foe's defence.

While the fighting proceeded a running fire of gibe and sneer issued from the duellists, who hurled at each other every objurgation and evil epithet in the calendar of satire. Once Ali leapt not too high and Selim's blade shore clean through a couple of his toes. The wound was sufficient to halt the most courageous, but though it bled profusely, the single-eyed swordsman proceeded as though nothing whatever had happened and indeed redoubled his energies. That a man of well over sixty should be able to stand up to such a gruelling test speaks well for the hardihood and valour of the men of the desert, and with greater ardour than before Ali pressed his adversary so closely that a look of terror began to appear in his swarthy features as he steadily gave ground.

Observing his confusion, the elder swordsman perceived his opportunity and struck savagely at his enemy's eyes. Selim successfully

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sought to parry the stroke, which, however, was never fully delivered. For at the decisive moment when the stroke should have been given, Ali's blade swerved downward, swift as the descent of lightning. A moment later, Selim, both of his legs severed below the knee, lay gasping out his life on the grass. The "brigand" had won his bride, and there and then I saw him call to the woman whose presence I had not noticed in the khan, and, reclaiming her as his wife, was gone into the darkness of the night.

Inasmuch as the actual business of buying of the camels had been completed, the money was paid; and eighteen animals had already been delivered to us: the Sheikh thought it unsafe to tarry any longer in that village but to push on to yet another northern village and leave the Bedouins there to effect the delivery of the rest of the camels within a fortnight.

Another day's dreary march of some ten miles, in and out of rocky eminences, brought us to the encampment where the last part of our transaction had to be done. But a most extraordinary sight struck upon our eyes before we were able to talk business with Sheikh Israr. A great deal of blood-feud was going on in the valley.

The valley when we approached it was now

black with people, such a concourse as I would not have believed that region could have poured into it. On the slopes surrounding the centre of the vale the several tribes were gathered, each with its insignia and marshalled under its leaders. The clamour of speech was everywhere, rising in little tides and waves, from which at times a spray of shouts and cries leapt up. The sight was like a flower-garden of parterres, the greens, blues and scarlets of garments and banners blossoming against the dark hillsides in sombre hues.

Then came the Sheikhs, robed in brown *abayas*, bearded, solemn. Taking their stand upon a small hillock, they consulted for a space. Then one of them stepped forward from the group and raised an arresting hand. Instantly a great hush fell upon the assembled clans. The elder's voice rose and fell in a monotonous sing-song at first, almost like that of a priest calling the *muezzin*. Then it broke suddenly into a loud note of denunciation. He thundered at those who had broken faith with his people, he lashed them with a fury of words which acted upon the tribes like brands of fire, lighting the dryness of their wrath into a blaze of resentment. There was a rustle of arms, of long-nosed guns and lances like the passage of a gale through a forest.

Realizing the effect of his oratory, the speaker

faltered. He had overstepped the limits necessary to his purpose. It was, perhaps, not his intention to goad the people to a fury which he might not later be able to check. He raised a restraining hand. He spoke more temperately. But his words appeared to have an even more infuriating effect upon his hearers, if that were possible. Perhaps the half-excuse for an enemy is the most effective way of rousing an audience to a full frenzy of hatred and enmity and perhaps the elder knew it. Again he altered his tone.

“So,” he cried, “if your murmurs express your true feelings, if you have been concealing your natural sentiments, why do you stand there inactive and hesitating? You have your remedy and it is not that of the onlooker. You are aware how you have been insulted, jeered at, called by opprobrious names, laughed at as women and cowards. And you only murmur like the little breeze that hails the sunrise! How gentle you are, how long-suffering. What wonder that your enemies see in you those feminine graces which they admire so much in their wives, their sisters and their daughters. In your patience you are beautiful. Alas that beauty should be so feeble!”

The old fellow had evidently gone all out after all. From the first I had known that

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trouble was on foot and the roars of rage which greeted his latest easily confirmed my worst suspicions. During his speech the massed bodies on the hillsides had begun to move in an agitated manner. Now they were swaying to and fro. Their rear ranks were running from side to side like creatures possessed. Lances and rifles were flourished, warlike slogans were being shouted from raucous throats.

The speaker ceased. His work was done and done well. The tribes broke order and surged towards the hillock, their faces distorted with fury, their great eyes rolling savagely. Great indeed is the power of oratory, especially when its ideas coincide with popular opinion and intention.

Witnessing this, my host spoke in a husky voice. "Brother! If we are wise we shall make no camp near them; but will return to Damascus forthwith."

"And water supply, brother?" I asked. We had only two days' supply left.

"Allah provides to the sons of the desert," he said, as under the darkness of a sinking moon we turned our camel train Westward.

That there was considerable unease throughout the Eastern desert and up to the regions of Jabal—at Shargi every man's hand was raised against his fellow—was all too clear to us. We

THROUGH THE GARDEN OF ALLAH

being the Town Arabs—so to speak—wished to take no part in inter-tribal quarrels; so water or no we pushed on Westward with all possible haste, although two camels were slaughtered on the way to use the store of water which these animals carried.

“If we get through the passes of the outer range, brother,” whispered the Sheikh to me on the second day, “we shall be free men!” But that was not to be. We were now negotiating the dreaded pass and marauders were many who did not care whom they looted.

The wildness of the pass can scarcely be conceived. Immense and jagged rocks which seemed to have been distorted into shapes peculiarly monstrous by the more evil tendencies in the forces of nature overshadowed the way, and seemed to make the night still darker and more terrible. The utter loneliness of the scene defies description.

I had hoped that we would have been able to negotiate this defile before nightfall, but the slow, dragging progress of the caravan's tail, where the older camels lagged behind, had retarded matters.

The long, snake-like body of our caravan had scarcely been swallowed up in the gloom of the pass when suddenly a noise like the crack of a giant whip resounded through the darkness.

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I knew that sound only too well.

It was the crack of a rifle. For a moment the whole length of the caravan stood stock-still, as though frozen into immobility. Then Eblis itself appeared to be let loose.

From the rocks above ragged grey shapes poured down upon us, firing as they came. That most of their bullets sang over our heads didn't matter in the least, for they caused as much confusion as though each one had found its billet. Many of the caravan party were armed and by this time had taken their weapons. They blazed into the darkness, but they could have effected little or no damage. I unshipped my Browning and set it going also, to provide a tonic example, more than in the hope of fending off the attack.

For some moments these exchanges took place. Then they were among us, furious men, flourishing long-nosed rifles and lances. A caravan is as easily frightened as a flock of pigeons and the weird yells and war-cries uttered by the attackers were echoed by the shrieks of our men who now ran helter-skelter through the darkness.

The camels, horses and asses, terrified by the hubbub, broke for freedom, but pressed into a mass by the confines of the narrow defile, could not run very far, and remained plunging, kick-

ing, neighing, braying and roaring, each according to its kind, in the hollow.

After about five minutes of this inferno, it became clear that only some twenty men had attacked us, and these were badly armed enough. Gradually those of us who possessed rifles or revolvers, gathered into a compact body apart from the camels and other animals, and began to pour a more or less well-directed fire into the thin ranks of the attackers. Little by little these gave way, and as their rifles did not allow them to load with one-half the speed our arms permitted of, it was really a miracle that although six of our men and two of the attackers were wounded, there were no casualties. Only one was dead: two were captured.

It was while I was searching for my camel that the sequel happened. I had left three men alive among the bandits, but when I returned not one of them was to be seen. When I asked what had become of them, the Sheikh pointed wordlessly to an ugly chasm in the rocks. I peered into its black profundity, but could see nothing but the velvet surface of darkness. The rent in the rock seemed "deeper than plummet ever sounded". With a shrug I returned to my camel, remounted and we were off once more. They had gambled and lost. It might have been *rouge* for us, but it was very much *noir* for them.

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After this harassing experience, as I wanted not to repeat it, I took leave of my friend the Sheikh upon our safe arrival at Damascus and journeyed to Beirut to board a steamer for Europe. Would I do it again? Someone might ask me. Yes! I would. If one would like to see the raw life of the world, one must resolve to live such as I have lived during my travels: otherwise *one does not travel* in the *real sense* of the word.

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